

2014 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM – FARM BILL
PHASE I, CONCEPT PROPOSAL
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)
DECEMBER 4, 2013

Please refer to “New Questions” identified under each section for most current questions and responses.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. When are Concept Proposals due?
Concept Proposals are due Friday, December 6, 2013, by 5pm PST. Refer to the 2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) Solicitation Timeline in the [2014 Notice of Funding Availability \(NOFA\)](#).
2. Do applicants need a DUNS number to submit a Concept Proposal?
No, applicants do not need a DUNS number to submit a Concept Proposal. However, applicants will be required to obtain a DUNS number to receive a 2014 SCBGP award. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number will be included in the Grant Proposal Instructions, and made available to applicants invited to submit a Grant Proposal.
3. Are the materials from the SCBGP workshop and webinar presentations available online?
Yes, the materials and audio presentations are available on the California Department of Food and Agriculture’s (CDFA’s) website at www.cdffa.ca.gov/grants.
4. Does passage of a Farm Bill affect the 2014 SCBGP?
Yes, funding for the 2014 SCBGP is contingent upon passage of a Farm Bill.
5. Is the “three-page Concept Proposal” separate from the Financial Assistance Application Submittal Tool (FAAST) application submitted, or is it part of the application on the FAAST site?
The Concept Proposal is completed on the FAAST system utilizing a question and answer format. The Concept Proposals are equivalent to approximately three (3) pages in length due to character limitations, including spaces, imposed on question responses. Refer to page 3 of the [2014 NOFA](#).
6. Can an organization submit multiple Concept Proposals?
Yes, an organization can submit multiple Concept Proposals so long as each submission represents a unique project.
7. Are there any restrictions on organizations handling multiple proposals?
No, there are not any restrictions on organizations handling multiple proposals, but applicants must assess their organization’s capabilities to ensure they can handle the funding and required activities for multiple grant projects within the stated timelines.
8. Can a Concept Proposal address more than one type of specialty crop?
Yes, a Concept Proposal can address more than one specialty crop, but it is not required.

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9. Would listing benefits to multiple specialty crops increase the chances of a Project Proposal receiving a SCBGP award?
No, benefitting multiple specialty crops does not necessarily increase the chances of a Project Proposal receiving a SCBGP award. Refer to the Concept Proposal Review Criteria listed in Appendix B of the [2014 NOFA](#).
10. Will CDFA provide answers to questions regarding the eligibility of Concept Proposals and Funding Category selection?
No, in order to maintain the integrity of the competitive grant process, CDFA is unable to advise and/or provide individuals with any information regarding specific proposals during the solicitation process. Applicants must determine whether specific Concept Proposals meet the purpose and criteria established for SCBGP funding and select a Funding Category. Refer to the [2014 NOFA](#) for details on eligibility and descriptions of funding categories.
11. Can the same Concept Proposal be submitted under multiple funding categories? Will CDFA move a Concept Proposal to the more appropriate Funding Category?
No, applicants must select the single Funding Category which best fits issues that the Concept Proposal addresses. The applicant, not CDFA, must decide the appropriate Funding Category. CDFA will not move the Concept Proposal to another Funding Category.
12. Is it appropriate to use abbreviations or acronyms in the Concept Proposal?
Yes, abbreviations and acronyms can be used in the Concept Proposal, but must be defined and spelled out at least once within the Concept Proposal.
13. Are Letters of Support required for submission of a Concept Proposal?
No, Letters of Support are not required for submission of a Concept Proposal.
14. Are Concept Proposals scored solely on the Concept Proposal Review Criteria?
No, the Technical Review Committee will use the Concept Proposal Review Criteria noted in the [2014 NOFA](#) as a scoring guide, but may also consider other qualitative factors.
15. What is the percentage of Concept Proposals generally invited to submit a Grant Proposal?
Historically, approximately 50% of Concept Proposals submitted are invited to submit a Grant Proposal.
16. Will CDFA answer questions over the phone?
No, in order to maintain the integrity of the competitive grant process, CDFA is unable to answer questions, advise, and/or provide individual applicants with any information regarding proposals over the phone during the solicitation process. Please e-mail all questions to grants@cdfa.ca.gov so FAQs can be published for all applicants.
17. Where can applicant's access prior year SCBGP project abstracts?
Prior year SCBGP project abstracts for [2010](#), [2011](#), [2012](#), and [2013](#) are available on CDFA's website.

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18. Are certain specialty crops viewed as more important than others?
No, all specialty crops are viewed as equally important.
19. Is a Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) required for submission of a Concept Proposal? Should the PMP be structured to describe the means by which an applicant will plan for and evaluate the success of implementing the stated activities?
No, a PMP is not required for submission of a Concept Proposal, but will be required in the Grant Proposal Phase. The PMP describes the means by which an applicant will plan for and evaluate the success of implementing project activities.
20. Does CDFA require the Technical Review Committee to review documents other than the Concept Proposal [Budget Template](#)?
No, CDFA only requires the Technical Review Committee to review the Concept Proposal [Budget Template](#); it is the only required attached document.
Has CDFA allocated a specific funding amount available for each Funding Category?
No, CDFA has not allocated a specific funding amount available for each Funding Category.
21. Will every grant recipient be audited?
Yes, every grant recipient will be audited.
22. Is there a cost for the SCBGP audit?
No, there is no SCBGP audit cost incurred by the grant recipients.
23. Why does CDFA encourage applicants to depersonalize projects (avoiding possessive pronouns such as “you” and “our”)?
CDFA encourages applicants to depersonalize projects so there is no confusion about what is being said and who is doing the work. For example, if there are multiple agencies listed in a proposal that says “we” then it is difficult to determine which agency is being referenced.
24. Does the Concept Proposal Review Criteria change from year to year?
The Concept Proposal Review Criteria may change from year to year as CDFA strives to improve the competitive process.
25. Do applicants have to meet all criteria within the program goals and objectives and funding categories they select?
No, the items listed are examples of what projects might resemble. Applicants should choose what their project best resembles, note how well their project connects with the program goals and objectives, and demonstrate how their project best aligns with the funding category selected.
26. Do all applicants have to provide details on sustainability efforts? Even if they do not have previous projects?
Yes, all applicants must provide details on how they intend to ensure their project will be sustainable; even if they do not have any previous projects.

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27. Should a consultant assisting with implementation of a Concept Proposal project be listed as a collaborator in FFAST?
Consultants can be listed in FFAST in the Cooperating Entities section. Cooperating entities are organizations an applicant is/will be working with to plan and/or implement the proposed project.
28. Should the legislative district be in relation to the applicant's location?
No, applicants should reference the location where the project work will be performed.
29. Is a Concept Proposal regarding aquaponics/hydroponics eligible under the SCBGP?
A Concept Proposal regarding aquaponics/hydroponics may be eligible as long as the crops being grown are eligible specialty crops, and the focus of the project is on the specialty crops and not the fish. Refer to the 2014 NOFA, Appendix C, if the proposal includes costs for constructing or purchasing an aquaponics system.
30. If multiple organizations representing the same specialty crop apply for a SCBGP grant, will that have a negative impact on funding decisions?
No, multiple organizations benefiting the same specialty crop will not have a negative impact on funding decisions.
31. Is a cooperative considered a non-profit or for-profit organization?
It is up to the applicant to identify whether or not it is a non-profit or for-profit organization.
32. When does the University of California, Davis' Center for Produce Safety (UC Davis, CPS) anticipate soliciting 2014 SCBGP food safety proposals?
The UC Davis, CPS expects to announce the solicitation process for SCBGP food safety proposals in January 2014. Applicants interested in submitting a food safety proposal for the 2014 SCBGP, should visit UC Davis, CPS' website, <https://cps.ucdavis.edu/>.

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33. If a Concept Proposal features two different geographic locations, should two separate Concept Proposals be submitted?
No, one Concept Proposal can feature multiple geographic locations.
34. What is the SCBGP funding formula?
Under the previous Farm Bill, the funding formula used to determine each states Department of Agriculture grant allocation is "Base Grant = Value of specialty crop production." (Note: The funding formula is subject to change upon passage of a new Farm Bill.)
35. Will CDFA provide examples of Concept or Grant Proposals?
No, CDFA does not provide examples of Concept or Grant Proposals.
36. Are Concept Proposals limited to specific brands?
No, Concept Proposals are not limited to specific brands but must solely benefit California specialty crops.

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37. Would a local farmer designated Project Director be considered a conflict of interest?
No, a Project Director who is a local farmer would not be considered a conflict of interest as long as grant funds do not benefit or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual.

ELIGIBILITY

1. Who is eligible to apply for funding?
The organizations eligible to submit a Concept Proposal solely benefitting specialty crops are: non-profit and for-profit organizations; local, state, and federal government entities including tribal governments; and public or private colleges, and universities. Refer to page 3 of the [2014 NOFA](#).
2. Are K-12 schools eligible for SCBGP funding?
Yes, K-12 schools are eligible for SCBGP funding if they meet the SCBGP eligibility requirements outlined in the [2014 NOFA](#).
3. Where can organizations access information regarding eligibility of a particular crop or commodity?
A list of eligible specialty crops is available on the United States Department of Food and Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) website <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/scbqp>.
4. Are organizations that have previously been awarded SCBGP funds eligible to apply for 2014 SCBGP funds?
Yes, organizations previously awarded SCBGP funds are eligible to apply for 2014 SCBGP funds.
5. Are proposals focused on processed foods made from California-grown specialty crops eligible for SCBGP funding? If so, can the proposal relate to the processing of specialty crops and the marketing of the processed products by specialty crop growers?
Yes, proposals focused on processed specialty crops products are eligible for SCBGP funding. However, since the purpose of the program is to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, the focus of the project proposal must be on the specialty crop in the processed product. Additionally, the specialty crop in the processed product must constitute greater than 50% of the product by weight, exclusive of added water.
6. Are organizations outside of California eligible to apply for SCBGP funding?
Yes, organizations outside of California are eligible to apply for SCBGP funding as long as the project solely benefits California specialty crops.
7. Is a researcher outside of California eligible for SCBGP funding?
No, SCBGP grant funds cannot be awarded to individuals, or provide a profit to a single organization or institution. The researcher must be affiliated with an eligible California organization. Refer to page 3 of the [2014 NOFA](#) for a list of eligible organizations.

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8. Can an organization not yet established as a legal entity apply for SCBGP funding?
Yes, however, applicants may be required to provide verification of their organization status if invited to submit a Grant Proposal. Please note: Grant funds will not be awarded for proposals that directly benefit or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual.
9. Are acorns, elderberry, red maid, tarweed, and clarkia seeds eligible specialty crops under the SCBGP?
Acorns, elderberry, red maid, tarweed and clarkia seeds may be an eligible specialty crop, if the plant is intensively cultivated and used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetic gratification.
10. Are acai and Indian rice grass seeds eligible specialty crops under the SCBGP?
No, acai seeds are not generally used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetic gratification, and Indian rice grass is a native grass which does not meet the definition of specialty crops.
11. Can a proposal that promotes California specialty crops include ineligible products or commodities?
Proposals may benefit ineligible products or commodities; however, SCBGP funds cannot be used to benefit non specialty crops. At the Grant Proposal phase applicants will be required to describe in detail what steps, methods, and processes will be used to ensure that all SCBGP funding will be used to solely enhance the competitiveness of California specialty crops. Some examples include: tracking systems, prorating costs, and/or using other funding.

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12. Are new venture specialty crop farms eligible for SCBGP funding?
New venture specialty crop farms may be eligible, if they meet the SCBGP eligibility requirements outlined in the 2014 NOFA. Refer to ELIGIBILITY FAQ #1.

FAAST APPLICATION

1. Will Concept Proposals submitted separate from FAAST be accepted?
No, Concept Proposals must be submitted in FAAST.
2. Are applicants required to provide all the information regarding “Project Location” in FAAST (i.e. latitude/longitude, watershed, county, responsible Regional Waterboard)?
No, applicants are not required to provide all project location information. Applicants must choose “STATEWIDE” for the Regional Waterboard.
3. Do character limits include spaces?
Yes, the character count includes spaces.

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4. Can applicants exceed the character limitations set in FFAST by providing more information in an attachment?
No, applicants cannot exceed the character limitations by providing more information in an attachment. Only the Concept Proposal [Budget Template](#) attachment is required.
5. Can an organization have more than one user account for FFAST?
Yes, an organization can have more than one user account for FFAST.
6. Is the Concept Proposal [Budget Template](#) automatically attached in FFAST?
No, applicants are responsible for attaching the completed Concept Proposal [Budget Template](#) in FFAST.
7. Is the “Project Management” and “Cooperating Entitles” tabs applicable to the SCBGP, and if so, what information should be provided?
The Project Management tab is where the information of the Project Director (authorized representative) and the Project Manager (day-to-day contact) is recorded.

If applicable, the Cooperating Entitles tab should identify the people or organizations that will help carry out the task of the proposed project.

PROJECT PURPOSE

1. Can specialty crop beneficiaries include the local economy that benefits as a result of the specialty crop industry?
Concept Proposals can note benefits to the local economy, but the primary focus must be the benefits to the specialty crop industry.
2. What is the intent of the SCBGP?
The intent of the 2014 SCBGP is detailed in the [2014 NOFA](#). There are also audio and workshop materials available on CDFA’s website.

PRIOR YEAR PROJECTS

1. If the proposal does not build on a previously-funded SCBGP project, do applicants still need to address the second part of Question 2, under Prior Year SCBGP Projects?
No, applicants do not need to address the second part of Question 2 under Prior Year SCBGP Projects if answering “No” to the first part of question 2; but can detail sustainability efforts.

POTENTIAL IMPACT

1. What information is requested regarding the “impact on California specialty crops”?
The impact should be defined by the results of the completed work and long-term quantifiable effects of the results – including sustainability efforts. Refer to the [2014 NOFA](#), Appendix A.

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2. What is meant by the following statement from the [2014 NOFA](#) (page 4, third bullet) “Be scalable to the larger community based on the outcome of the project proposals for ongoing projects to illustrate a sustainable funding source beyond the life of the proposed grant?”
[Applicants should demonstrate that the project proposal has the ability to grow and continue after the grant funding ends.](#)
3. Should all Concept Proposals demonstrate sustainability efforts?
[Yes, all Concept Proposals should demonstrate sustainability efforts.](#)

EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

1. What is the difference between an output and an Expected Measurable Outcome?
[Outputs: Outputs are the direct results of the activities that will be conducted. They are products, goods, or services that applicants \(or partners\) create or deliver during the course of the grant. Output statements usually, but not always, include a “who” or “what” that will receive the product, good or service.](#)

[Outcomes: Outcomes are the impacts or changes that will be achieved through the outputs. An outcome is a level of performance or achievement. Outcome statements should state clearly who or what will change \(if the proposed work is successful\), and by when.](#)
2. Should the Concept Proposal include Expected Measurable Outcomes funded by Matching Funds/In-Kind Contributions?
[No, the Concept Proposal should only include Expected Measurable Outcomes funded by SCBGP funds.](#)

PROJECT DURATION

1. What is the grant duration for any proposed project?
[Projects can start anytime on or after October 1, 2014, but must be completed on or before June 30, 2017.](#)
2. Do projects have to last the full two years, nine months?
[No, the project duration can be shorter as long as the start date and end date of the project are within the grant duration.](#)

WORK PLAN

Revised Question: December 4, 2013

1. Does the Work Plan need to list activities performed by all personnel responsible for carrying out project activities?
[No, the Work Plan must only list all personnel grant-funded activities.](#)

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BUDGET

1. Is the Concept Proposal [Budget Template](#) an excel document?
Yes, the Concept Proposal [Budget Template](#) is an excel document.
2. Where can applicants get the Concept Proposal [Budget Template](#)?
The Concept Proposal [Budget Template](#) can be downloaded from the [2014 NOFA](#) and/or [FAAST](#).
3. How do applicants determine what costs are allowable and unallowable?
Applicants must refer to the Federal Cost Principles, determine which Administrative requirements apply to their organization, and review the applicable Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). Refer to page 6 of the [2014 NOFA](#), and Appendix C.
4. Is there a set percentage of SCBGP funds that is suggested for consultants?
No, there is no set percentage of SCBGP funds suggested for consultants. It is up to each applicant organization to determine how they allocate costs.
5. What are the maximum rates per individual contractors and consultants?
The maximum hourly rate per individual contractor/consultant is \$65 an hour, excluding travel and sustenance. Refer to Federal pay scales [GS-14, Step 10](#) to determine maximum rates for your locality/area.
6. Does the [GS-14, Step 10](#) rate include benefits and indirect costs?
No, the rates do not include benefits and indirect costs.
7. When is justification required for contractual rates greater than [GS-14, Step 10](#) hourly and/or flat rates?
Justification will be required for applicants invited to submit Grant Proposals.
8. What are examples of a justification for individual contractor rates that exceed the Salary of the [GS-14, Step 10](#)?
A justification for an individual contractor rate that exceeds the Salary of the [GS-14, Step 10](#) may include, but is not limited to: a cost price analysis from at least three contractors who can perform the service; an explanation of unique qualifications, special expertise due to the complexity of the project/task or limited pool of available or qualified contractor.
9. Regarding [GS-14, Step 10](#), if there is no specific locality pay area table, which table is used?
As indicated by Office of Personnel Management, use the "Rest of U.S." when your locality is not provided in the [GS-14 tables](#).
10. If a contractor charges indirect costs, does the applicant need to have an indirect cost rate agreement with the Federal agency?
No, applicants are not required to have a separate agreement for indirect charges from contractors. All requirements are outlined in the [2014 NOFA](#).

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11. What is the maximum amount of indirect cost an organization is allowed? Does the amount include indirect costs charged by subcontractors?
The maximum amount of indirect cost an organization is allowed is 5% of the total Personnel Services (Salary and Wages plus Fringe Benefits). The 5% allowed includes all indirect costs budgeted by the grant recipient and its subcontractors.
- For example, if Salary and Wages plus Fringe Benefits total \$100,000, the indirect cost cannot exceed \$5,000. If the organization hires a subcontractor/consultant who charges \$1,000 in indirect, the maximum amount the organization may claim for their indirect is \$4,000.
12. Is the indirect cost rate negotiable?
No, indirect costs cannot exceed 5% of the total Personnel Services (Salary and Wages plus Fringe Benefits). The 5% limit is what each applicant must adhere to.
13. Can SCBGP funds be used for out-of-state travel?
Yes, SCBGP funds can be used for out-of-state travel as long as all expenditures are necessary and reasonable to the proposed project.
14. Is general purpose equipment, capital expenses, or capital component of a larger project allowable?
No, general purpose equipment, capital expenditures, and improvements to capital assets that materially increase their value or useful life are unallowable as direct and indirect charges. Refer to the [2014 NOFA](#), Appendix C.
15. What are the payment methods to pay for costs incurred under the SCBGP?
There are two types of payment methods to pay for allowable costs incurred – advance payments and reimbursement payments.
16. If a cooperating entity is being paid with grant funds, should they be listed under Personnel or Contractual?
If a cooperating entity is being paid with grant funds they must be listed under Contractual.
17. Do supply costs have to be less than \$5,000?
No, there is no limitation to the *total* supply cost; however, per unit costs cannot exceed \$5,000.
18. Can equipment costs greater than \$5,000 be included in the equipment budget line item?
Yes, equipment with a useful life of a year or more and costs greater than \$5,000 *per unit* must be included in the equipment line item.
19. Is a justification required during the Concept Proposal phase for equipment that costs greater than \$5,000?
No, a justification is not required for equipment that costs greater than \$5,000 in the Concept Proposal phase. A justification will be required for applicants invited to submit a Grant Proposal.

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20. Is fundraising an allowable cost?

No, organized fundraising, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise or obtain contributions regardless of the purpose for which the funds will be used is unallowable. Refer to the Federal Cost Principles applicable to your organization type outlined in the [2014 NOFA](#), Appendix C, page i, to determine allowable and unallowable costs.

21. If a fiscal sponsor of a non-profit organization charges fees based on the percentage of funds raised, what budget category should the fees be listed under?

It is up to each applicant, based on their organization's policies, to determine if the fees should be categorized as direct or indirect costs. Refer to BUDGET FAQ #20.

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22. Can equipment costs less than \$5,000 be included in the equipment budget line item?

Equipment costs less than \$5,000 *per unit* are defined as supplies, and must be included in the supplies line item.

23. Does Program Income need to be reflected in the Concept Proposal Budget?

No, Program Income does not need to be reflected in the Concept Proposal Budget. Information regarding Program Income will be included in the Grant Proposal Instructions and made available to applicants invited to submit a Grant Proposal.

MATCHING FUNDS

1. Are Matching Funds and In-Kind Contributions required?

No, Matching Funds and In-Kind Contributions are not required for the SCBGP, but are **strongly** encouraged.

2. What are matching funds? What are unallowable matches?

Matching funds are the portion of project costs that are not borne by the funding source. Match dollars should be used to meet the objectives of the proposed project and may be either cash or in-kind contributions. In general, matching funds that do not meet these criteria are unallowable.

3. Where should Matching Funds and In-Kind Contributions be reported in the Concept Proposal?

Matching Funds and In-Kind Contributions must only be reported on the Project Budget Tab of the FFAST Application during the Concept Proposal Phase.

4. Are there any restrictions on where Matching Funds come from?

No, since Matching Funds and In-Kind Contributions are not required, there are no restrictions on where they come from but they must be relevant to the project.

5. Is there a preference between a Cash Match vs. In-Kind Contributions?

No, there is no preference between a Cash Match and In-Kind contributions as neither are required.

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6. Does the Concept Proposal budget template only include the total SCBGP grant funds requested? Does the Project Budget Tab total include the Matching Funds?
Yes, the Concept Proposal budget template should only include the amount of SCBGP funds requested. Yes, the Project Budget Tab total includes the Matching Funds.

For example, if the Concept Proposal Budget totals \$400,000, and Matching Funds total \$100,000 the Project Budget Tab in FFAST will read \$500,000.