

Conservation Agriculture Planning Grants Program (CAPGP)

Questions and Response

August 15, 2022

A glossary of acronyms is included at the end of this document.

Eligibility

1. Can community gardens or food forests be eligible as “agricultural operations”?
Yes, CDFA will not exclude these types of agricultural operations from receiving planning assistance through CAPGP.
2. To be eligible does a farmer or rancher need to have been in production for a certain number of years or can a plan assist a producer developing production on currently fallow ground?
CDFA has not established limitations on the types of agricultural operations that can be served or can apply, including how long they have been operating or current cropping situation.
3. Is there a minimum level of economic activity necessary for an agricultural operation to be eligible for funding or for planning assistance?
No, CDFA has not set any guidelines or limitations around this.
4. Is there a minimum land tenure requirement for an agricultural operation to be eligible for funding or for planning assistance?
No, there are not restrictions related to land tenure on the agricultural operations that can receive or benefit from funding.
5. If a farm organization has a Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) on staff, would that farm organization apply for the grant or would the CCA?
The CCA may apply for funding to support the develop of plan(s) for the farm or the farm may apply and indicate that the CCA is the qualified expert. The CCAs qualifications must align with the types of plans for which the farm wishes to seek for funding. If the farm is the applicant, then the farm will receive the funds as the awardee.

6. Who is the recipient of the funding, the CAPGP applicant or the farms and ranches that will receive planning assistance?

If selected for an award, the applicant will enter into an agreement with CDFA and be the recipient of the funding.

7. May an eligible applicant who submits a proposal also be included in another organization's application as an expert?

An organization may only submit one application, but individuals that work within an organization may be identified as experts within other applications.

8. Why are Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) indicated as eligible applicants? The plan categories seem to be on the farm level and not geared towards agency level planning.

A GSA could help farmers and ranchers develop the conservation agriculture plans if an individual within the GSA meets the minimum qualifications. GSAs may consider applying for funding to develop plans with farmers and ranchers if this aligns with their agency's efforts around groundwater sustainability.

9. Could an organization apply on behalf of a farmer/rancher that does not have a planning expert on staff but can still hire one?

The individual that will work with farmers and ranchers to develop any plans will need to be identified at the time of application. The organization will need to provide the planning expert's qualifications in the application.

10. Are foreign universities eligible to apply?

No, only California public universities and colleges are eligible.

11. Are agricultural cooperatives not based in California eligible for this grant?

A non-profit or agricultural cooperative applicant to the CAPGP program may have a mailing address outside of California, but all the agricultural operations that receive planning assistance must be located within California.

12. If the applicant is not a USDA NRCS-registered Technical Service Provider (TSP) for the type of plan that a farmer is interested in, can the applicant identify a qualified individual or company to provide the technical assistance via a subaward?

Yes. To meet eligibility requirements, the primary applicant must be one of the eligible applicant types listed on page 4 of the Request for Grant Applications, including any NRCS-registered TSP. An eligible applicant can then identify a different individual to be the planning expert for any of the types of plans but must provide qualifications for that individual. An applicant may contract with an expert to support the development of different plans if the applicant themselves are not qualified to develop the plan type.

Priority Funding

13. On page 5, the Request for Grant Applications (RGA) indicates that CDFA will prioritize Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers (SDFRs) and non-farmer applicants that commit to expending 25% of the funding to provide planning assistance to SDFR farmers. What is the definition of SDFRs?

The Farmer Equity Act of 2017 defined Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers. "Socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher" means a farmer or rancher who is a member of a socially disadvantaged group. "Socially disadvantaged group" means a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. These groups include all of the following: (1) African Americans (2) Native American Indians (3) Alaskan Natives (4) Hispanics (5) Asian Americans (6) Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

Minimum Qualifications Review

14. May one qualified expert work with multiple farmers?

Yes, a qualified expert may submit one application to assist multiple farmers.

15. May the same expert be listed as a resource on multiple farmers' applications?

Farmers and ranchers that apply will need to identify an expert and provide that individual's qualifications for review. Multiple farmers and ranchers may designate the same individual on their individual CAPGP applications.

16. If a non-profit is applying, would every individual developing plans need to prove they are qualified?

For each type of plan that the applicant would like to prepare they should submit the qualifications of an individual that will lead that plan development. If it will strengthen the application to submit the name and qualifications of more than one person for a plan, that is also possible.

17. How are the minimum qualifications determined? Is there a point system used to assess applications?

CAPGP applications will be reviewed based upon the minimum qualifications criteria outlined on a page 9 of the RGA. An individual that is registered as a Technical Service Provider (TSP) with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the planning categories identified in the application will be determined to have met minimum qualifications.

Individuals that are not registered with NRCS as TSPs will provide evidence and explanation of qualifications. Reviewers will evaluate the provided qualifications and explanation and determine whether the individual has provided adequate evidence. No point system will be used to assess applications. Applicants are required to submit a resume and strongly encouraged to provide certifications, transcripts, examples of past work, and other evidence of qualifications. Evidence of qualifications must be related to the types of plans indicated in the application.

18. Will CDFA begin reviewing submitted applications before the grant deadline?

CDFA will initiate the review of the applications during the application period in the order that applications are received. Notifications of the funding decisions will be announced after the close of the application period and review period.

Plan Types

19. Can two different plans be produced for a single ranch or agricultural operation, for example, a carbon farm plan and a grazing management plan?

Yes, multiple plans or planning activities can be completed for an agricultural operation or part of an agricultural operation.

20. What is the difference between a Conservation Planning Activity (CPA) and Design and Implementation Activity (DIA)?

This is described more in the RGA and on linked pages hosted by USDA NRCS. Both are types of planning activities that can be funded through CAPGP.

21. Does a Conservation Planning Activity (CPA) need to be developed before applying for funding for Design and Implementation Activity (DIA)?

CDFA will support the development of a DIA regardless of the development of or existence of a corresponding CPA.

Payment Rates and Payment Process

22. Are the payment rates listed in the RGA on a per-plan basis?

Yes, the CDFA payment rates listed in Appendix A of the RGA are for each plan to be developed.

23. Does the standard payment rate include funds for traveling to sites and other costs such as staffing?

Yes, the payment rate is based upon the expected costs in developing plans, including travel and other costs such as personnel and overhead. See Appendix A of the RGA for more information on what has been considered in the development of payment rates.

CDFA will not collect invoices or substantiating documentation for travel or other line-items expenditures. Reimbursement of the flat payment rate will be dispersed to the awardee after the plan(s) is completed and submitted to CDFA.

24. As a non-profit, would these funds go through the non-profit and given out to specific farmers, or can the funds be used to build projects that benefit a larger number of farmers (ex. creating resources)?

The funds will be issued to the awardee, which can be a non-profit, for the purpose of the developing a plan or plans for a farm or multiple farms. The funding cannot be used for any other purpose.

25. Other than advance payments, are there any eligible billings, or is the only other payment made when a plan is completed?

No, besides an advance payment, the reimbursement will be made when the plan is complete and submitted to CDFA. With justification, awardees may request up to 25% of the award as an advance payment.

26. What is the purpose of 10% withholding as described on page 11 of the RGA?

For this program CDFA will have a final report process to close out the agreement. 10% of the award may be withheld until the final report is submitted and approved.

27. Can applicant organizations be reimbursed for outreach related to the planning process?

CDFA will issue a flat payment for each plan to the awardee of the project. Outreach activities have not been considered in the development of the rates, but payment rates may be adequate to cover outreach.

28. Can applicant organizations subcontract the plan writing?

An applicant can work with another expert to develop the plan. The applicant will need to submit that individual's qualifications at the time of the application.

29. Is the payment rate for the plan alone or does it include equipment or service packages?

The payment rate (and the CAPGP program) only covers planning; it does not cover the implementation of the plan nor any practices and technologies that might be recommended within a plan.

30. May an applicant request less than the flat payment rate into the application?

CDFA will pay the flat payment rates for each plan type as outlined in Appendix A of the RGA. Applicants may not request less than the payment rates established for the program. Applicants must complete the budget portion of the application using the flat payment rates for each type of plan.

31. Does CDFA award funding for required grant management activities, such as progress reports?

CDFA will provide payment to awardees based up on established payment rates for each plan completed. These rates, while they do not explicitly include costs associated with grant management activities, are expected to be adequate to cover costs associated with the progress reporting process.

32. Are there any limitations to using the CAPGP funds to develop one or more plans that are also being developed with support from other funding sources?

CDFA will not require, track or request information regarding matching funds or cost-share used to develop conservation agriculture plans.

33. Will this grant cover the cost associated with identifying resource concerns before beginning the planning process such as soil sampling, soil health assessments, irrigation system distribution uniformity and the necessary materials?

Applicants can find information about the payment rates and what was considered in development of the rates in Appendix A of the RGA. CDFA expects that payment rates will be adequate to cover costs associated with assessments necessary to inform plans.

34. If the cost estimate for the conservation agriculture plan is more expensive than the CDFA flat payment reimbursement, can an awardee indicate the CAPGP agreement as secured funding in another grant application?

An awardee can seek additional funding and may indicate the CAPGP funding as secured if an agreement with CAPGP is fully executed. CDFA will not require or request information regarding matching funds.

35. There are 2 payment rates for 163 DIA Irrigation Water Management Design: 1-2 Designs and 3+ Designs. Explain the multiple design aspect.

Through the development of DIA 163 – Irrigation Water Management Design, an awardee may work with an agricultural operation to develop several designs related to irrigation practices (e.g., pipeline, pumping plant, reservoir, etc.). If one or two types of practices are included and designed, then the payment rate will be “1-2 Designs”. If the planning activity involves 3 or more designs, then the payment rate will be “3+ Designs”.

Reporting

36. The RGA mentions “...individuals assisted who belong to groups such as SDFRs and/or farms and ranches 500 acres or less.” Is 500 acres a threshold for qualification as a priority population?

Five hundred acres or less is not a qualification for CDFA priority in this program, but it does align with other efforts at CDFA around technical assistance. For that reason, CDFA may track this metric through progress reports submitted by CAPGP awardees.

Requirements for Completed Plans

37. When an awardee submits a completed plan to CDFA, what will CDFA review to approve reimbursement?

CDFA will review the submitted plans to ensure that the deliverables outlined in the USDA NRCS code document (see linked documents in the CAPGP RGA Appendix A) are included. CDFA will require that the plans include documentation that the farmer or rancher was satisfied with and approved the completed plan.

38. Appendix A indicates that a pump test is required for DIA 163 – Irrigation Water Management Design. What does this mean?

For DIA 163 – Irrigation Water Management Design, pumps tests are required as part of the plan development.

39. Does a person's project have to be approved through the NRCS prior to applying for funding through the CAPGP program?

No, CAPGP program is aligned with NRCS requirements and references many NRCS resources, but CDFA will receive the completed plans as evidence that the plans were developed. This program (CAPGP) only funds the development of the plans.

Miscellaneous

40. Are there lists of previous grantees that applicants can review?

No, this is the first year that CDFA is accepting applications for the CAPGP.

41. How would these plans support other CDFA programs like Healthy Soils Program (HSP) and SWEEP?

An awardee of CAPGP funding may utilize the developed plans to determine whether to pursue funding from other CDFA opportunities such as the HSP, SWEEP, or grants from other sources.

42. What sort of obligation does the farm have if/once the conservation plans are created?

After the plans are complete and the grant agreement is closed out, the awardee does not have any further obligation to CDFA.

43. Will applying for this grant opportunity interfere or disqualify an applicant from any other grant opportunities?

An applicant or awardee of the CAPGP can apply to other funding opportunities offered by CDFA such as the Healthy Soils Program, State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program, or other programs. If the farm or applicant wishes to use the developed plans to seek funding from USDA NRCS, it is important to consult with a local NRCS office.

44. The Request for Grant Applications (RGA) indicates that, "Plans that are not completed by USDA NRCS-certified Technical Service Providers (TSPs), may not be eligible for implementation funding by USDA NRCS programs." Can a TSP sign off on plans, or do they need to be the ones completing the entire plan?

CDFA encourages applicants to consult with their local USDA NRCS office on this question.

AmpliFund Questions

45. Is the person who begins the application automatically designated as the administrator?

In the application there are input fields to indicate roles for different individuals. The person who initiates the application does not need to be designated as the administrator.

46. Do applicants need to know the counties the farms will be in even if the farms don't need to be identified in advance?

Applicants can indicate that the planning assistance will benefit farmers in multiple counties or all counties.

Glossary

CAPGP – Conservation Agriculture Planning Grants Program

CCA – Certified Crop Advisor

CDFA – California Department of Food and Agriculture

CPA – Conservation Planning Activity

DIA – Design and Implementation Activity

GSA – Groundwater Sustainability Agency

HSP – Healthy Soils Program administered by CDFA

NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service

RGA – Request for Grant Applications

SDFR – Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Rancher

SWEEP – State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program

TSP – Technical Service Provider registered with USDA NRCS

USDA - United States Department of Agriculture