



National Association of
Conservation Districts

NACD URBAN AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
October 2019

NACD and NRCS have teamed up to help districts and their partners provide much needed conservation technical assistance for urban agriculture in developed and developing areas. Through NRCS' support, the NACD Urban and Community RPG has created an Urban Agriculture Conservation grants initiative that will provide funding for approximately 18 districts for one year.

This list was prepared to help answer many of the common questions. After reviewing the Request for Proposal (RFP), contact Debra Bogar at deb-bogar@nacdnet.org if you don't find your answer here.

1. *What is the purpose of the grant?*

The purpose is to increase district capacity for providing urban agriculture conservation technical assistance in communities where the land use is predominantly developed or developing...whether urban or rural.

2. *Who is eligible to submit a proposal?*

Only conservation districts as defined by the NACD Bylaws (explained in the RFP footnote) are eligible to submit a proposal and oversee the project. Partners and supporters are strongly encouraged.

3. *Our district has received a previous NACD Urban Agriculture Conservation grants. Are we eligible to apply for this one?*

Yes, those who have received a previous UAC grant from NACD can apply for one additional grant cycle within the following criteria. The initial project must be completed and ongoing in some format to meet the original sustainability requirement. The new proposal will need to include a description of the first project's accomplishments, including metrics. It must also explain how the new activity/service will enhance the initial project and/or begin a separate project.

4. *Our district applied for a previous Urban Agriculture Conservation grant but did not receive one. Would it be appropriate to resubmit the same project?*

Since the Selection Teams did not indicate why proposals did not receive a grant, it may be helpful to review the 2016 and 2017 UAC Reports to get an idea of what was successful. Both resources are available at www.nacdnet.org/about-nacd/what-we-do/urban-and-community/.

5. *What is considered 'urban agriculture'?*

The phrase covers a broad array of activities. USDA National Agriculture Library defines as "taking the form of backyard, roof-top and balcony gardening, community gardening in vacant lots and parks, roadside urban fringe agriculture and livestock grazing in open space". Repurposing properties (under-utilized buildings, brownfields, etc) for urban agriculture and conservation practices will also be considered as will innovative projects not mentioned or previously seen in the 2016 and 2017 Reports (www.nacdnet.org/about-nacd/what-we-do/urban-and-community/).

6. *What is 'developed or predominantly developing land use'?*

The Design Team does not define this. Applicants should describe the area and population they plan to serve through the grant. If an applicant can make a convincing case that the area (of any size, including an individual neighborhood) is developed or predominantly developed, the review panel will use that information to make their evaluation.

7. *Are projects limited to cities?*

No, developed and predominantly developing land is occurring across the entire country. It isn't just the size of the area that is most important; it's also the need of the community(ies).

8. *What are examples of underserved areas and populations?*

While not required, additional consideration may be given to proposals that address underserved areas especially in 'food deserts'. An interactive map for food deserts is available at www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.aspx. Underserved populations are those diverse groups of people who have not traditionally received services from conservation districts and their partners. Examples include but are not limited to low-income residents of urban areas or underserved minority urban agricultural producers, migrant and/or non-English-speaking populations seeking a foothold in rural or urban settings, urban dwellers who find support in community gardening projects, and women in urban agriculture.

9. *Is this initiative part of current state NRCS initiatives?*

No.

10. *Are applicants required to apply for the full amount (\$50K)?*

No. Applicants may apply for however much they feel is needed to accomplish the project and to also allow it to continue after the initial grant with the support of the community and partners.

11. *Is there a requirement to match the grant funds?*

Yes. There is a 25% match of the total NACD funds required, which can be provided through cash and/or in-kind services. Examples of in-kind include donated materials, value of additional non-federal staff time, value of District board members' time at \$500 per day and other volunteers' time at \$25.43 per hour (from Independent Sector), free advertising, etc.

12. *Is there a limit on the amount of grant used for salary?*

No. The only budget limits apply to supplies (no more than 15%) and administrative (no more than 10%). Salary and benefits are up to the applicant. Note that a key evaluation criteria is how the service will be sustained after the initial grant funding.

13. *Can we hire a part-time person?*

Yes, as well as contractor(s) as long as the focus is on conservation technical assistance.

14. *If the grant funds are to be used to support staff, then does the sustainability expectation require maintaining that position?*

The proposal needs to show how conservation technical assistance for urban agriculture will continue in future years, whether through staff, contractors or other creative ideas.

15. *What is Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)?*

Conservation technical assistance is the help (design and on-the-ground) provided to individuals, communities, organizations and agencies to address opportunities, concerns, and problems

related to the use of natural resources to help them make sound management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands. Examples of CTA are available through NRCS online at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/technical/cta/?cid=nrcs143_008365 or www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/technical/cp/.

16. What are examples of eligible CTA activities?

- Providing conservation technical consultation to urban agriculture operations, groups and individuals
- Providing conservation technical assistance to developing and existing urban agriculture projects to encourage inclusion of conservation practices in the project implementation
- Hosting conservation workshops and/or practice implementation demonstrations (e.g. nutrient management, water management, soil health, high tunnels, invasive plants, pest management, pollinator habitat, conservation systems, etc.); grant funds can be used to reimburse cost associated with speakers, venue and materials directly associated with the conservation practice presentation
- Encouraging land managers to work with NRCS and Districts to develop conservation plans.
- Upon request, developing conservation plans that address the natural resource concerns of the decision maker
- Promoting NRCS conservation technical assistance, financial assistance and easement programs to groups engaged in urban agriculture
- Coordinating training sessions for groups and individuals who wish to learn more about the technical tools that have been developed by USDA and could aid in sustainable urban agricultural production (Web Soil survey, FOTG, Conservation Client Gateway, Plants Database, Know Your Farmer Know Your Food, national agricultural library, etc.)
- Meeting with groups and land managers, including representatives of other units of government to educate them on the NRCS conservation planning process
- Developing and disseminating conservation related materials (fact sheets, articles, signs, posters, NRCS contact information, etc.) targeted to urban agriculture producers

17. Can the proposed project be part of an existing initiative?

The grant objective is to increase conservation technical assistance. If the funds will be used to enhance the existing initiative, and not to replace current resources, then it would be eligible though it will have to compete with proposals for new initiatives.

18. Can funds be used to purchase land for urban agriculture/garden plots?

No. The funds are to be used for conservation technical assistance.

19. Can the funds be used for tree planting in a city or village park?

As the funds are for conservation technical assistance for urban agriculture, they could be used to help identify appropriate sites and plants for a fruit or nut tree grove that will be open to public harvest as well as ensuring appropriate planting. The 15% limit on supplies and equipment likely precludes the purchase of the actual grove trees.

20. Would the development of an urban ag education program to be presented in schools qualify as technical assistance?

Yes, as it could fall under the 'coordinating training sessions' though it will compete with other proposals that may result in more proactive urban agriculture conservation support for communities.

21. *What types of equipment or supplies can be purchased?*

Up to 15% can be used for computer, office supplies, lab fees, soil testing, permits, planting and irrigation tools, signs, promotional materials, etc and should be listed in the proposal. Additional funds for these should be sought elsewhere. These grant funds cannot be used for large equipment such as vehicles.

22. *Can funds be used for cost-share to help cover the cost of on-the-ground practices?*

Since this Initiative focus is to provide technical assistance, grant funds cannot be used to cost-share conservation practices and projects.

23. *Does the NRCS Technical Manual have practices specific to urban agriculture?*

While not listed as 'urban agriculture', many of the practices for soil health and water management are appropriate and would just be done on a smaller scale.

24. *Are other resources available?*

Many reports and articles can be found by Googling 'urban agriculture'. The USDA developed an Urban Agriculture Toolkit available at www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/urban-agriculture-toolkit.pdf.

25. *Who are potential partners?*

Applicants are encouraged to seek beyond traditional partners, particularly those in the community who can help sustain the project beyond the initial grant funding. Some examples include businesses, medical community, colleges, churches, and nonprofits including current community gardens. Specific examples can be found in past NACD Urban and Community Conservation webinars (www.nacdnet.org/policy/urban/webinars) and the NACD 2016 and 2017 Urban Agriculture Conservation Initiative Reports (www.nacdnet.org/about-nacd/what-we-do/urban-and-community/urban-agriculture-conservation-grant-recipients/).

26. *Can the district subcontract with another entity to complete the project?*

Yes, some subcontracting is acceptable though not all funds. While partnering is encouraged to achieve project sustainability, one goal of this initiative is to enhance district capacity to provide conservation technical assistance in urban and community areas. Passing the project to another entity will not achieve this goal.

27. *Can the funds be transferred to a lead partner of the project?*

Districts must maintain control of the funds and thus are advised to reimburse partners for approved tasks on a regular schedule.

28. *Can districts partner with their state association?*

Yes, as long as a lead district submits the application and oversees the project.

29. *What are examples of national showcasing?*

Some examples within NACD include presentations at regional and national meetings, presenting on an Urban and Community Conservation webinar, posting on the NACD Urban and Community Conservation Network on Facebook, posting on the NACD Blog. Applicants can also consider showcasing within other national organizations.

30. *What if we can't get long-term funding committed before the proposal deadline? Can we still apply with tentative commitments?*

It is not necessary to have long-term funding committed for the application. However, applicants will need to show community support and potential partners.

31. *Is there an application form or required format?*

The categories are provided in the RFP as subsections of the Proposal Guidelines along with word count limits. All categories need to be included in the proposal or it will be pulled from the review process. Any text over the 500-word limit per section will NOT be considered by the Selection Team.

32. *How will proposals be evaluated?*

A separate review and selection team will use the criteria listed in the RFP on page 5.

33. *Do some criteria carry more weight or importance than others?*

No.

34. *When will the funds be provided to the awardees...upfront or reimbursed?*

An initial check will be provided to cover the first three months of expenses. Thereafter, a quarterly check will be sent for each of the subsequent three months.

35. *What happens if we can't complete the grant work within the allotted time? Can the timeline be extended? Do we have to repay the money?*

Applicants are strongly encouraged to complete the grant funded portion of the project within the proposed timeline. Extensions will be considered on a case by case basis.

36. *Is a signature of approval required for the proposal?*

Instead of a signature or reference to board action in meeting minutes, a resolution adopted by the district board must be submitted in writing stating the board has reviewed and approved the proposal and has addressed potential conflicts of interest.

37. *Will federal grant regulations apply?*

Yes. Regulations applying to federal grants must be followed as do any state regulations and requirements (e.g. conflict of interest policies, accounting practices, etc).