

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Request for Applications: The Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program

AGENCY: Forest Service.

ACTION: Request for applications.

SUMMARY: The Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service, State and Private Forestry, Cooperative Forestry staff, requests applications for the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (Community Forest Program or CFP). This is a competitive grant program whereby local governments, qualified nonprofit organizations, and Indian tribes are eligible to apply for grants to establish community forests through fee simple acquisition of private forest land. The purpose of the program is to establish community forests by protecting forest land from conversion to non-forest uses and provide community benefits such as sustainable forest management, environmental benefits including clean air, water, and wildlife habitat; benefits from forest-based educational programs; benefits from serving as models of effective forest stewardship; and recreational benefits secured with public access. Eligible lands for grants funded under this program are private forest that is at least five acres in size, suitable to sustain natural vegetation, and at least 75 percent forested. The lands must also be threatened by conversion to non-forest uses, must not be held in trust by the United States on behalf of any Indian tribe or allotment lands, and if acquired by an eligible entity, must provide defined community benefits under CFP and allow public access.

Dates: Application deadline is [insert date 90 days from issuance of the **Federal Register**] for submitting applications to the State Forester or equivalent official of the Indian tribe and [insert date 120 days from issuance of the **Federal Register**] for State Forester or equivalent official of the Indian tribe submitting the applications to the Forest Service.

Addresses: All local governments' and qualified nonprofit organizations' applications must be submitted to the State Forester of the State where the property is located. All Indian tribal applications must be submitted to the equivalent official of the Indian tribe. The Forest Service encourages applicants to contact and work with their State Forester or equivalent official of the Indian tribe when developing their proposal. The State Forester's contact information may be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/cfp.shtml>. All applicants must also send an e-mail to communityforest@fs.fed.us to confirm an application has been submitted for funding consideration.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For questions regarding the grant application or administrative regulations, contact Scott Stewart, Program Specialist, 202-205-1618, sstewart@fs.fed.us or Maya Solomon, Program Coordinator, 202-205-1376, mayasolomon@fs.fed.us. Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Relay Service (FRS) at 1-800-877-8339 twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year, including holidays.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: CFDA number 10.689: To address the goals of Section 7A of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 2103d), the Forest Service is requesting proposals for community forest projects that protect forest land that has been identified as a national, regional, or local priority for protection and to assist communities in acquiring forestland that will provide public recreation, environmental and economic benefits, and forest-based educational programs. Detailed

information regarding what to include in the application, definitions of terms, eligibility, and necessary prerequisites for consideration can be found in the final program rule, published October 20, 2011 (76 FR 65121-65133), which is available at www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/cfp.shtml and at www.grants.gov (Opportunity number CFP-FS-1002011).

Grant Application Requirements

1. Eligibility Information

a. *Eligible Applicants.* A local governmental entity, Indian Tribe (including Alaska Native Corporations), or a qualified nonprofit organization that is qualified to acquire and manage land, as defined at §230.2 of the final rule. Individuals are not eligible to receive funds through this program.

b. *Cost Sharing (Matching Requirement).* All applicants must demonstrate a 50 percent match of the total project cost. The match can include cash, in-kind services, or donations, which shall be from a non-Federal source. Additional requirements and information are found in §230.6 of the final rule at www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/cfp.shtml.

c. *DUNS Number.* All applicants shall include a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number in their application. For this requirement, the applicant is the entity that meets the eligibility criteria and has the legal authority to apply and receive the grant. For assistance in obtaining a DUNS number at no cost, call the DUNS number request line 1-866-705-5711 or register on-line at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>.

d. *Central Contractor.* Prospective awardees shall register in the Central Contractor Registration (CCR) database prior to award and remain registered, during performance, and through final payment of any grant resulting from this solicitation. Further information can be found at www.ccr.gov. For assistance, contact CCR Assistance Center 1-866-606-8220.

2. *Award Information* Total CFP funding anticipated for awards made under this program is [insert funding level for applications \$X.XX million]. Individual grant applications may not exceed \$400,000. Awarding of grants under this program is contingent upon the availability of appropriated funds. No legal liability on the part of the Government shall be incurred until appropriated funds are available and committed by the grant officer for this program to the applicant in writing. The initial grant period shall be for 2 years, and acquisition of lands should occur within that timeframe. The grant may be reasonably extended by the Forest Service when necessary to accommodate unforeseen circumstances in the land acquisition process. Written annual financial performance reports and semi-annual project performance reports shall be required and submitted to the appropriate grant officer.

3. *Application Information* Application submission. All local governments and qualified nonprofit organizations' applications must be submitted to the State Forester where the property is located by [insert date 90 days from issuance of the **Federal Register**]. All Indian tribal applications must be submitted to the equivalent official of the Indian tribe by [insert date 90 days from issuance of the **Federal Register**]. The State Forester's contact information may be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/cfp.shtml>. All applicants must also send an e-mail to communityforest@fs.fed.us to confirm an application has been submitted for funding consideration. All State Foresters and equivalent officials of the Indian tribes must forward applications to the Forest Service by [insert date 120 days from issuance of the **Federal Register**].

4. Application Requirements The following section outlines grant application requirements:

a. The application can be no more than eight pages long, plus no more than two maps (eight inches by eleven inches in size), the grant forms specified in (b), and the draft community forest plan specified in (d).

b. The following grant forms and supporting materials must be included in the application: (1) An Application for Federal Assistance (Standard Form 424); (2) Budget information (Standard Form SF 424c-Construction Programs); and (3) Assurances of compliance with all applicable Federal laws, regulations, and policies (Standard Form 424d-Construction Programs).

c. Documentation verifying that the applicant is an eligible entity and that the land proposed acquisition is eligible lands (see §230.2 of the final rule).

d. Applications must include the following, regarding the property proposed for acquisition: (1) A description of the property, including acreage and county location; (2) A description of current land uses, including improvements; (3) A description of forest type and vegetative cover; (4) A map of sufficient scale to show the location of the property in relation to roads and other improvements as well as parks, refuges, or other protected lands in the vicinity; (5) A description of applicable zoning and other land use regulations affecting the property; (6) A description of relationship of the property within and its contributions to a landscape conservation initiative; and (7) A description of any threats of conversion to non-forest uses, including any encumbrances on the property that prevent conversion to nonforest uses.

e. Information regarding the proposed establishment of a community forest, including: (1) A description of the benefiting community, including demographics, and the associated benefits provided by the proposed land acquisition; (2) A description of community involvement to-date in the planning of the community forest acquisition and of community involvement anticipated long-term management; (3) An identification of persons and organizations that support the project and their specific role in establishing and managing the community forest; and (4) A draft community forest plan. The eligible entity is encouraged to work with the State Forester or equivalent official of the Indian tribe for technical assistance when developing or updating the Community Forest Plan. In addition, the eligible entity is encouraged to work with technical specialists, such as professional foresters, recreation specialists, wildlife biologists, or outdoor education specialists, when developing the Community Forest Plan.

f. Information regarding the proposed land acquisition, including: (1) A proposed project budget (section §230.6 of the final program rule); (2) The status of due diligence, including a signed option or purchase and sale agreement, title search, minerals determination, and appraisal; (3) Description and status of cost share (secure, pending, commitment letter, etc.). Section §230.6 of the final rule; (4) The status of negotiations with participating landowner(s) including purchase options, contracts, and other terms and conditions of sale; (5) The proposed timeline for completing the acquisition and establishing the community forest; and (6) Long term management costs and funding source(s).

g. Applications must comply with the Uniform Federal Assistance Regulations (7 CFR Part 3015).

h. Applications must include the forms required to process a Federal grant. Section §230.7 refers to the grant forms that must be included in the application and the specific administrative requirements that apply to the type of Federal grant used for this program.

5. Forest Service's Project Selection Criteria

a. Using the criteria described below, to the extent practicable, the Forest Service will give priority to applications that maximize the delivery of community benefits, as defined in the final rule (see §230.2 of the final rule).; and

b. The Forest Service will evaluate all applications received by the State Foresters or equivalent officials of the Indian tribe and award grants based on the following criteria: (1) Type and extent of community benefits provided, including to underserved communities. Community benefits are defined in the final program rule as: (i) Economic benefits such as timber and non-timber products; (ii) Environmental benefits, including clean air and water, stormwater management, and wildlife habitat; (iii) Benefits from forest-based experiential learning, including K-12 conservation education programs; vocational education programs in disciplines such as forestry and environmental biology; and environmental education through individual study or voluntary participation in programs offered by organizations such as 4-H, Boy or Girl Scouts, Master Gardeners, etc.; (iv) Benefits from serving as replicable models of effective forest stewardship for private landowners; and (v) Recreational benefits such as hiking, hunting and fishing secured through public access. (2) Extent and nature of community engagement in the establishment and long-term management of the community forest; (3) Amount of cost share leveraged; (4) Extent to which the community forest contributes to a landscape conservation initiative; (5) Extent of due diligence completed on the project, including cost share committed and status of appraisal; (6) Likelihood that, unprotected, the property would be converted to non-forest uses; and (7) Costs to the Federal Government.

6. Grant Requirements

a. Once an application is selected, funding will be obligated to the grant recipient through a grant.

b. Local and Indian Tribal Governments should refer to 2 CFR Part 225, Cost Principles for State, Local, and Indian Tribal Governments (OMB Circular A-87) and 7 CFR Part 3016 (Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments) for directions.

c. Nonprofit organizations should refer to 2 CFR Part 215 Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Other Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals and Other Nonprofit Organizations (OMB Circular A-110) and 7 CFR Part 3019 Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and other Nonprofit Organizations for directions.

d. Forest Service must approve any amendments to a proposal or request to reallocate funding within a grant proposal. If negotiations on a selected project fail, the applicant cannot substitute an alternative site.

e. The grant recipient must comply with the requirements in section § 230.8 in the final rule before funds will be released.

f. After the project has closed, as a requirement of the grant, grant recipients will be required to provide the Forest Service with a Geographic Information System (GIS) shapefile: a digital, vector-based storage format for storing geometric location and associated attribute information, of CFP project tracts and cost share tracts, if applicable.

g. Any funds not expended within the grant period must be de-obligated and revert to the Forest Service.

h. All media, press, signage, and other documents discussing the creation of the community forest must reference the partnership and financial assistance by the Forest Service through the CFP.

i. Additional conditions of the grants awarded under this program are found in section §230.9 of the final rule.

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