

## AgCWIP FY 2024 RFP FAQ

Last Updated: 12/8/2023

### **Q. I am a farmer. Can I apply to this program for practice implementation or equipment purchases?**

A. Funding for farm pollution reduction project implementation, including equipment acquisition for practice implementation, is not an eligible activity under the current Agricultural Clean Water Initiative Program Request for Proposals. There are a variety of other funding opportunities available to support on farm implementation, more information is available on our website [here](#). The funding made available through AgCWIP is prioritized to provide impact and benefit for multiple farm operations via a community/organization level rather than an individual farm project. Individual farms are eligible applicants, but the *activities* that are eligible for funding are services provided to more than one farm. For example, if a farm wanted to mentor other farms or host a workshop series on their farm, they may choose to seek financial support through this funding opportunity.

### **Q. Does “organizational” imply favor towards non-profits vs private businesses?**

A. Proposals submitted by non-profit organizations will be prioritized for funding. Applicant status (Non-Profit, Private) counts for 5% of the total ranking score. Private businesses are eligible to request funding for organizational capacity development activities.

### **Q. Would supplies include items that help with in-field surveys (i.e. drones, cameras)**

A. Equipment such as cameras, drones, and in-field survey equipment are eligible under the supplies category and can be considered if included in the proposal. Supplies include materials or equipment that enhance services to farmers by service providers. Equipment, vehicles, and machinery such as no-till drills or trucks are not eligible.

### **Q. Do “new positions” funded by AgCWIP include positions that get support from other funding sources?**

A. Yes, requests for new positions are an eligible activity and can include new positions that will leverage funding from other sources. The Request for Proposal provides details on the requested information to include with the experience and qualifications of the project team which includes the Rate of Project Involvement: What percentage of one FTE of each team member will be supported by this proposed scope of work and funding? (ie. Ag Resource Specialist 1 – 50% or 0.5 FTE funded by AgCWIP to accomplish proposed outcomes). Applicants are not required to provide how many funding sources go towards a position, though it can be helpful for an application to describe staffing structure in detail. Staffing structure can be described in the “Experience and Qualifications of the Project Team” section of the application.

### **Q. Are climate change activities a new addition to eligible activities? Are there boundaries envisioned for the topic area?**

A. Yes, this is an expansion of eligible activities previously supported through AgCWIP. Following the establishment of the Vermont Climate Council in 2020, the Vermont Climate Action Plan was drafted to identify pathways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate climate impacts throughout the

state. In part, the plan emphasizes the role agriculture has in capturing and mitigating pollution to our environment and recognizes the co-benefits that improving soil health and water quality have for climate mitigation. Education, outreach, and technical and financial assistance for the implementation of soil-based practices that improve soil quality and nutrient retention, reduce erosion and the discharge of waste, and increase crop production are encouraged through the priorities of the Vermont Climate Action Plan. A total of \$1.5 million in ARPA funding is available under this opportunity to bolster support and efforts for climate change mitigation initiatives in the agricultural sector.

**Q. Do applications have to cover any work happening before June 30<sup>th</sup>?**

A. Work completed under a grant agreement before the start date or after the end date listed in Grant Agreement Part 1 – Grant Award Detail shall not be eligible for payment. For example, if your grant start date is May 15, only activities after May 15<sup>th</sup> would be listed under your grant agreement and eligible for grant funds. Please include your scope of work timeline in your application as part of the Scope of Work & Proposed Workplan section of your proposal.

**Q. Is there a line for adding administrative costs, or basing costs on a billable rate?**

A. Administrative costs are eligible but indirect rates may not exceed 20% of direct costs. Applicants are recommended to consider and plan for the expected reporting and grant management requirements required to successfully execute their proposed scope of work.

**Q. Can AgCWIP provide funding for projects including innovative research?**

A. While AgCWIP is not primarily a research funding opportunity, the AgCWIP program has supported a variety of innovative research projects in the past within the context of innovative phosphorus reduction activities. Attainable targets outlined with well-developed outcomes and goals, as well as experience and qualification of the project team in applied research would be key components of a successful proposal for a research project. Additionally, while matching funds are not a requirement of the application, the Agency encourages applicants to include planned or anticipated match in their proposal.

**Q. When does grant money need to be spent by?**

A. Funds will be obligated for a maximum of two years for grant activities to occur with award expiration dates estimated to be July 1, 2026. Agreements funded with ARPA-Climate funding will have a strict completion deadline of July 1, 2026. For projects that may take more than two years, we recommend splitting the project into phases, detailing your project timeline, and considering an application for the phases that are able to be completed in two years.

**Q. Is this a funding bubble? Will this level of funding be available through FY2026?**

A. VAAFPM plans to continue to offer the AgCWIP program with similar levels of Clean Water Funding on a bi-annual basis. A total of \$6 million in Clean Water Fund dollars are available under this opportunity for efforts to improve water quality in the agricultural sector. A total of \$1.5 million in **one-time** American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding is available under this opportunity to provide funding for climate change

mitigation efforts in the agricultural sector. The AgCWIP budget is influenced by the State of Vermont's annual [budget process](#), and recommendations from the [Clean Water Board](#).

**Q. Could this funding go towards soil testing with follow-up reports and plans for farmers?**

A. Yes, soil sampling and soil test analysis review with farmers is an eligible activity. These funds have been used in the past for soil testing efforts. The interest of the applicant in funding the tests or funding staff time towards soil testing should be articulated in the grant application.

**Q. Are ongoing series of workshops eligible as an activity area?**

A. If there is an agricultural water quality or climate mitigation component to the workshop series, it would be eligible for funding through AgCWIP.

**Q. Is training for staff an eligible expense?**

A. Yes.

**Q. Is training for a subcontractor an eligible expense?**

A. Yes.

**Q. Are local efforts to gather feedback and develop watershed strategies, such as Local Work Groups hosted by Natural Resources Conservation Districts, eligible activities?**

A. Yes.

**Q. Are stipends to farmers an eligible activity and expense?**

A. Yes. Stipends for farmers to attend trainings, workshops, stakeholder meetings, etc. related to water quality and climate change mitigation are eligible activities and expenses.

**Q. If I have a current AgCWIP agreement, applied for and was awarded funding through this grant round, would I have two agreements or can I amend my current agreement?**

A. If an entity with an existing grant award is provided an additional funding award and the scope of work and timeline are closely related to an existing award, the primary option would be to amend an existing agreement if applicable. A separate agreement is also a possibility. This would be negotiated after the application review and award notice, and during the development of a grant agreement.

**Q. How are Water Quality education credits related to AgCWIP and what do they entail?**

A. The Agency encourages applications that include educational efforts that are likely to qualify for [water quality educational credits](#). The Required Agricultural Practices (RAPs) require Certified Small Farm Operations, Medium Farm Operations, Large Farm Operations, and Custom Applicators obtain water quality educational credits. The AgCWIP program is VAAF's primary mechanism to ensure sufficient water quality educational opportunities are available and accessible for all farms in Vermont to access and maintain compliance with RAP credit requirements.

**Q. Does geographic scope matter in the application?**

A. One of the ranking criteria is “Watershed Planning.” This is discrete from geographic scope. Watershed Planning will be reviewed based on how the applicant connects their project proposal with Vermont TMDLs and/or with the specific watershed priorities and strategies outlined in [Tactical Basin Planning](#). Strategies to meet the goals of Act 64, the Clean Water Act and TMDL requirements are identified in the Tactical Basin Planning process.

**Q. Is agricultural business planning an eligible activity?**

A. Yes. Business planning related to water quality, conservation planning, climate change mitigation, and farm viability are eligible activities.

**Q. Are there any guidelines (minimums or maximums) on requested funding levels?**

A. There are no minimum or maximum amounts for funding requests. In the past, our grant awards range from \$10,000 - \$2 million depending on scope and scale of projects. Cost is 20% of the proposal ranking criteria, and cost evaluation will consider the average annual cost of each activity area in your proposal relative to other proposals, as well as the clarity of your budget and budget justification, and relation to anticipated outcomes. During the review and award process, the State may require additional cost and budget details.

**Q. If an organization only has part time employees or subcontractors, will it impact eligibility for this funding opportunity?**

A. No this would not impact eligibility. An organization with part time employees or subcontracted work is eligible. Your application should include an organizational chart of staff who will be supporting the proposed activities and indicate which activities the individuals will be supporting. Additionally, if your proposed scope of work includes hiring a consultant or subcontractor, please either identify the subaward recipients in your proposal or describe how you will select your consultant or subcontractor, including what criteria and qualifications you will require and your selection process. Include a description of your approach to contract management.

**Q. What does the grant payment schedule look like?**

A. Grant payments are deliverables-based, tied to semi-annual reporting every 6 months. As long as reports show reasonable progress towards meeting grant goals/deliverables, payment will be provided after report review and approval by the grant manager. Typically, AAFM provides the opportunity for some up front funding available upon executed agreement, but reserves 10-15% of funding until final report and grant completion, with the remaining funding divided amongst the remaining report deliverables.

**Q. Is goCrop subsidization an eligible expense under AgCWIP?**

A. Yes, nutrient management software fees are an eligible expense. The AgCWIP funds are competitive and encompass a wide variety of eligible activities. Applicants are advised to include relevant budget details and justifications in the proposal and to explain how those priorities connect to the State’s priorities, and impacts on water quality.

**Q. Do you have to be a Vermont business to apply?**

A. No, however services provided, and the scope of work performed must benefit Vermont farmers and the Vermont agricultural community.

**Q. Can an organization submit more than one application?**

A. Applicants are highly encouraged to submit a single proposal per organization to support the effective and consistent delivery of services to the agricultural community. The benefits of this in the application and ranking process is that the collective strength of the proposal in the ranking categories of capacity, impact, and cost make up 70% of the ranking criteria. Submitting separate proposals places each proposal into a position where it is competing against every other proposal.