

FAQs for the Agricultural Clean Water Initiative FY2020 Funding Round

(July 18, 2019)

1. Is there a usual range in dollar amount that you could suggest for a proposal?

The Agency has the discretion to award partial funding for project proposals, so we suggest you apply for the total project cost detailing matching funds etc., with appropriate explanation of how this project and the monetary request will achieve the Agency's priority outcomes for this funding. Depending on the proposals selected for funding we may provide partial funding toward the project rather than full funding, if awarded at all. Please note that cost is 35% of the proposal review and ranking.

VAAFM did not offer an AgCWIP funding round in FY 2019. In the FY2018 program, awarded projects ranged from 2-4 years in length and included awards with average annual costs ranging from 3,000 to 214,000. Please note these awards were for different activity areas of work and included a larger number of eligible activity areas.

2. When submitting a proposal, should an applicant submit one proposal that integrates organizational capacity and equipment maintenance, or should that be broken into two separate proposals?

The intent is for each organization/entity to submit one proposal that would incorporate all of the activity areas they are proposing.

3. How much funding is available?

The Agency anticipates obligating \$500,000 through this funding round.

4. How much funding is allocated to each activity?

The available funding is not earmarked toward specific activities, rather the Agency will determine funding to be awarded to each activity area based on the proposals received and approved for funding.

5. Can funding be used for staff time to write grants and collect field data or just the staff training in how to do it?

Organizational Development funding can support the following activities:

- development of an organization such as the purchase of software for improved database or financial management (such as GIS or bookkeeping and accounting software),
- operational expenses such as staffing costs or field equipment, strategic planning or other types of board or programmatic development;
- training of staff or volunteers for: volunteer recruitment and management; grant writing; membership recruitment and retention; or field techniques/field data collection,
- support for collaborative projects that catalyze new partnerships and community-supported conservation, stewardship, and outreach initiatives, as well as
- administration and management of innovative equipment that results in water quality improvement.

Organizational development funding is available to develop and strengthen an organization's effectiveness.

6. Can funding be used to purchase water quality testing probes (multi-parameter field kit for DO, temp, pH, conductivity, etc.)?

Yes, operational expenses such as field equipment is eligible for funding under organizational development.

7. Under equipment, would VAAFM consider supporting the purchase of drones for conservation planning field assessments and implementation monitoring for non-regulatory purposes?

Yes, operational expenses such as field equipment is eligible for funding under organizational development.

8. Can administrative support for membership recruitment count as organizational capacity development?

Yes, membership recruitment and retention is eligible for funding under organizational development.

9. Can funding be subcontracted to another organization to do outreach?

Proposals to subcontract specific pieces of a project are allowable and need to be detailed in the proposal as well as the draft budget proposal.

10. Does equipment maintenance include paying individuals managing equipment for their time?

Yes, administration and management of an equipment rental program would fall under organizational development.

11. Do outreach initiatives need to be connected to particular collaborative partnerships or can they be standalone initiatives?

Outreach initiatives may or may not involve collaborative partnerships, but partnerships may benefit the applicant in the ranking of proposals in regard to the impact of the project which is weighted at 35% of proposal selection criteria.

12. Where does continuing technical assistance fit into this RFP, for example for conservation planning, NMP updates, helping farmers secure funding, and implementation oversight?

VAAFM currently has roughly \$1.2 million allocated annually for these activities for the next year through existing Agricultural Clean Water Initiative Program grants.

13. Will reporting and payments be similar to the system currently used for AgCWIP 2?

Reporting and grant payments will be structured similarly to those in current Agricultural Clean Water Initiative Program agreements.

14. Will there be an advance payment upon signing the new agreement?

Grant payments will depend on proposals selected for funding, existing payment schedules in current grant agreements, as well as the timeline of grant work approved for funding.

15. How would VAAFM recommend recipients account for the backlog of NRCS or BMP practice implementation when it affects the deliverables in a grant agreement?

Grant applicants are not recommended to include deliverables in their proposal that are out of the scope of their proposed work, and/or related to population level accountability.

16. In regard to water quality testing, could funds be utilized to offer broader testing of private landowner water, i.e. paying for test and equipment as a service to offer to local communities?

VAAFM has an existing program within the Agency which can provide water quality testing at no cost to farmers and neighbors of farms.

17. Does the conservation practice survey fall under the original deliverables in fiscal year 2018 grant agreements or is it a new set of performance measures?

Farm Conservation Practice Surveys are a new activity area available for funding within the Agricultural Clean Water Initiative Program.

18. Could you please provide more information about the survey? Our understanding was that NRCS data would be imported into the partner database in non-farm specific form. Wouldn't recording farm-specific information result in double counting?

NRCS staff will not be accessing the partner database at this point in time. Data from the NRCS is submitted annually to the DEC for purposes of assigning related nutrient reductions.

When surveying a farm for a conservation practices, it is important to note all the implementation of a practice such as cover cropping, and coordinate with appropriate NRCS office to determine which of the fields were paid for and verified by NRCS, and reporting this in the data in the partner database. This will also reduce the number of fields requiring field verification by the surveyor, as all non farmer funded practices must be field verified in order to be reported in the partner database. All NRCS funded practices will be "flagged" in the partner database aggregated report, so as to reduce any potential double counting of a practice, prior to being provided to the DEC for nutrient reduction calculations. This effort is detailed in Section 9. of the [Quality Assurance Project Plan](#) for the Partner Database.

19. Will VAAFM be able to provide written assurance that information entered into the partner database will only be used for non-regulatory purposes and will not be released to entities outside of the 1619 signatories of the VAWQP?

Please refer to the "AAFM Confidentiality Protections of 6 V.S.A. § 61 Memo 07012019" provided to all partner database users via email on July 12, 2019 for the Partner Database Launch for written assurance regarding protection of survey data.

20. Would programs and events that support farm diversification and viability through, for example, marketing and social media workshops, diversified ag farmer panels, meet & greets with local/regional buyers, product labeling workshops, value added workshops, and legal specialists for on-farm events and recreation be eligible?

Please refer to the RFP for eligible activity areas of work, and note that The Agency is calling for agricultural water quality program proposals that address the following priority outcomes to improve water quality in Vermont:

- Regulatory Compliance and Agricultural Non-Point Source Pollution Reduction
- Economic and Environmental Viability on Vermont Farms

21. The application template mentions a fourth category of “Additional Activities” for innovative proposals. Does this mean that we can propose activities in addition to the three categories mentioned in the RFP?

Often grant projects incorporate multiple activity areas. If your project includes work within an activity area for which project deliverables do not fall within organizational development, farm conservation practice surveys, or conservation equipment maintenance, please include within the Additional Activities section of the proposal template.

22. Regarding surveying activities - will the target farms include all sizes of farms - LFO, MFO, CSFO, SFOs? Is there a priority?

The survey activities will be assigned once proposals for this work are selected and will include working with all size farm operations.

23. Will there be a requirement that any and all fields/tracts identified as having the defined practices implemented be verified with a field visit (i.e. will farmer provided information be solely relied upon or will practices need to be ground truthed)?

As per the [Quality Assurance Project Plan](#) for the Partner Database, any solely farmer funded practice is required to be field verified by the partner reporting it, in order to be reported in the partner database and eligible for nutrient reduction calculation. Practices funded by state or federal programs are not required to be field verified by a partner as these programs have field verification protocols.

24. Will the survey be a one-time effort or is this activity seen as being done on an on-going year to year basis?

The conservation practice survey work will be a continual effort of the Agency and may be focused or target specific areas of the state from one year to the next.

25. When does VAAFAM anticipate releasing the next AgCWIP RFP? Will there be a bid in state FY2021?

VAAFAM will release additional funding for this program as clean water funding becomes available for agricultural water quality grants and contracts. There is no guarantee of a FY2021 funding round.

26. Can existing FY 2018 AgCWIP grants be amended with a 4-year proposal or are amendments limited to 2 years?

It is possible to amend existing agreements with new project proposals, but there is no guarantee these amendments will extend the time period of the initial grant agreement. This will be dealt with on a case by case basis.