

SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

CONFERENCE CALL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS (MARCH 2, 2016)

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This document summarizes the questions and answers discussed during the March 2, 2016 conference call with the State points of contact related to the changes in the application templates ([Grant Administration Template](#) and [Project Profile Template](#)) and the SCBGP's [Evaluation Plan \(Performance Measures\)](#). The table of contents (BELOW) provides a listing of each question addressed in this document. The original question's content is below the question's header as well as a response to the question.

This document will be updated periodically as the SCBGP staff receives additional questions regarding the application templates and evaluation plan.

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OUTREACH

OUTREACH TO SPECIALTY CROP STAKEHOLDERS TO IDENTIFY FUNDING PRIORITIES

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Q 1 - DO WE STILL NEED TO SOLICIT PROGRAM PRIORITIES?

In the past we were strongly encouraged to solicit program priorities from our specialty crop stakeholders. Are we still supposed to do this with the implementation of the outcome measures?

ANSWER TO Q 1

Yes, you are strongly encouraged to solicit program funding priorities with your state's specialty crop stakeholders. This requirement was included as a result of recommendations in the [2008 Farm Bill Joint Statement of Managers](#). Additionally, we are frequently asked if the states are soliciting funding priorities. Funding priorities broadly outline your state's objectives that would be used to place one application ahead of other applications that do not have the assigned priority designation. Priority designations can affect the list of applicants recommended for funding by a review committee by placing certain applications ahead of others. For example, applications may receive additional points during your competitive review if they address one or more of the funding priorities. Some examples of funding priorities could include:

- Cultivating the Next Generation of Specialty Crop Farmers
- Effectively Detecting, Excluding, and Controlling Invasive Species for Specialty Crops

Q 2 - CAN WE LIMIT THE PRIORITIES THAT OUR STATE OFFERS?

Is it ok for us to limit the priorities we as a state offer or do we have to offer all the ones the USDA SCBG has, which would mean removing some of the outcomes based on the priorities our state would choose to offer?

ANSWER TO Q 2

Not all outcomes and indicators may be applicable to funding priorities identified for a specific year or a State Plan. You may remove outcome measures that are not applicable to your state's priorities to simplify your application process. However, each project must have at least one approved outcome measure and indicator.

OUTREACH TO SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED AND BEGINNING FARMERS

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Q 3 - IS IT A PROBLEM IF NONE OF OUR PROJECTS BENEFIT SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED OR BEGINNING FARMERS?

If none of our projects benefit a socially disadvantaged or beginning farmer is that a problem?

ANSWER TO Q 3

This is not a problem; however, we encourage you to conduct extensive outreach to interested parties, especially socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers. This requirement was included as a result of recommendations in

the [2008 Farm Bill Joint Statement of Managers](#). Additionally, we collect this information because we get requests about how the SCBGP benefits these populations based on the program's statistics.

PROJECT PROFILE TEMPLATE

OVERALL

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Q 4 - CAN WE CHANGE THE CONTENT OF THE CERTIFICATION STATEMENTS?

Regarding the statements requesting a check in the box. Are these amendable or are you requiring them to be word for word?

ANSWER TO Q 4

The statements currently provided in the project profile template should remain the same. You can, however, add your own state's policies to align with your Request for Applications. These certifications were placed in the document to minimize the number of questions about an application's or sub-application's policy and process and to ensure that expenditures aligned with the non-Federal entity's internal policies.

Q 5 - SHOULD WE STILL FUND MULTI-STATE PROPOSALS?

Because of the SCMP, should we now refer applicants who have a multi-state proposal to apply to that program instead?

ANSWER TO Q 5

We still encourage you to accept all applications which seek to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops and consider them for funding through your competitive process.

Q 6 - SHOULD WE USE THIS TEMPLATE FOR ANY PREVIOUS YEAR PROJECTS?

If we submit amendment requests for 2015 agreements and years prior, should new project proposals for these years be presented in this updated template?

ANSWER TO Q 6

No. This template will only apply to 2016 applications and years going forward. Any new project proposals for grants implemented in 2015 and prior to 2015 should be presented in the old SCBGP project profile format.

PROJECT DURATION

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Q 7 - WHY ISN'T THE SCBGP REQUIRING A WORK PLAN?

Why isn't the SCBGP requiring a Work Plan and/or project timeline? Can states still request them? Can states still submit the Work Plans to the SCBGP?

ANSWER TO Q 7

The Work Plan was removed to ease some of the burden of submitting an application to the SCBGP as well as the review of a submitted application.

You may continue to collect Work Plans from your sub-applicants to help you make qualified project funding decisions as part of your application review and selection process; however, you must not submit them with your application package to the SCBGP. If you submit your projects' Work Plans to us, we are required to review them and provide feedback, which could unnecessarily increase your application's review time.

Q 8 - HOW WILL THE REMOVAL OF THE WORK PLAN AFFECT PERFORMANCE REPORTING?

If the Work Plan is omitted from the State Plan, in the final report are we going to be asked to discuss the Work Plan in the Project Approach section? What will replace that?

ANSWER TO Q 8

The performance report templates have been revised to align with the new project profile template. You can find the updated performance report templates at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/guidance>.

Q 9 - CAN PROJECT START/END DATES DIFFER FROM GRANT AGREEMENT START/END DATES?

Our individual projects typically begin after the overall state plan and end well before it in order to build a "buffer" in case a subrecipient needs more time to complete the project. Is this ok?

ANSWER TO Q 9

Yes. If these dates change during the course of the project, you would report those changes in your interim (annual) performance reports.

Q 10 - HOW ARE THE START DATES FOR PROJECTS DETERMINED?

Who determines when the states can start a project? Most of our grants are 3 years in length. Does the state or AMS determine how long a project should be?

ANSWER TO Q 10

You as the state can determine when your agreement starts with the SCBGP; however, each SCBGP agreement between the state and USDA must begin on or before September 30 of the Federal fiscal year in which the RFA is published. This is because SCBGP funds are annual appropriations and must be obligated and initiated by the end of the Federal fiscal year. The Federal fiscal year ends on September 30. Grant agreements with the SCBGP cannot go beyond 3 calendar years in length.

Projects implemented by the state or a sub-applicant can begin and end any time within the grant agreement. These dates are determined by the state.

PROJECT PARTNER AND SUMMARY

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Q 11 - HAVE YOU COMBINED PREVIOUS SECTIONS INTO ONE?

It appears that the Project Partner and Abstract sections were combined into one. Why?

ANSWER TO Q 11

These two sections were combined to ease the burden for both the state departments of agriculture and the SCBGP staff. Previously the SCBGP would write the project summary based on the information in the project profile. Starting in 2016, we will use this section to collect the summaries that we will use to promote projects that you fund.

Q 12 - HOW DO THE PROJECT SUMMARY AND PURPOSE DIFFER?

What's the difference between the project summary and the project purpose?

ANSWER TO Q 12

The Project Summary is very similar to what the abstract was. The Project Summary is a summation of intended project activities and outcomes. This statement will be used to promote the project. When requests are made of the program for particular projects, this is what will be released to the public. For example, if SCBGP received a data call for potato projects in a particular state, we would provide the project summary. The Project Purpose provides more detail about the project's background, reasons that it's being proposed, and the beneficiaries for the project. The Project Purpose is essentially the "nuts and bolts" of the proposal while the Project Summary is a condensed statement of the project's activities and outcomes.

PROJECT PURPOSE

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Q 13 - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN OBJECTIVE AND AN OUTCOME?

How is an objective different from an outcome? How does it intersect/support/apply to an outcome and its selected indicator?

ANSWER TO Q 13

A project's objectives are different from the outcomes and indicators provided in SCBGP's Performance Evaluation Plan. The main differences are specificity and measurability.

- Objectives should flow from the purpose or goal of the project and be stated as actions that are realistic and tangible, but not quantifiable, during the project. An example could include:
 - To adapt lettuce cultivars to environments in which less water and nitrogen will be available and applied.
- Outcomes and indicators are distinctly measurable and are a result of achieving the purpose and objectives of the project. An example could include:
 - Outcome 4 Greater capacity of sustainable practices of specialty crop production resulting in increased yield, reduced inputs, increased efficiency, increased economic return, and/or conservation of resources.
Indicator 1: Numbers of plant/seed releases
Indicator 2c: Number of producers reporting increased dollar returns per acre or reduced costs per acre

Q 14 - HOW MUCH DETAIL IS REQUIRED FOR THE PROJECT BENEFICIARIES?

In the Project Beneficiaries section, do we need to provide a descriptor for the number of beneficiaries? (For example, 100 farmers, 65 women, or 50 children.)

ANSWER TO Q 14

No, we just require the number of beneficiaries. This subsection is derived from the Potential Impact and is meant to simplify the information that was previously collected. We plan to collect this number, aggregate, and then communicate the national impact of the program to beneficiaries.

Q 15 - DO PROJECTS NEED TO ONLY BENEFIT SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED AND BEGINNING FARMERS TO RECEIVE THAT DESIGNATION?

What if only a portion of the project benefits socially disadvantaged or beginning farmers?

ANSWER TO Q 15

If the project directly benefits socially disadvantaged or beginning farmers in any way, you should select “yes” to certify to that fact in this section. We defer to states to determine this as defined in the RFA. Please be aware that we get requests for projects that benefit socially disadvantaged or beginning farmers and provide project abstracts to the public to explain how each project benefits these groups.

EXTERNAL PROJECT SUPPORT

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Q 16 - IS THE EXTERNAL PROJECT SUPPORT SECTION NEW TO THE PROJECT PROFILE TEMPLATE?

Is the External Project Support section new? Why is it being used?

ANSWER TO Q 16

No, it is actually the renamed “Project Commitment” section. We renamed this section because there was continued confusion about the requirements, which remain the same.

EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

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Q 17 - CAN THE EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES OCCUR OUTSIDE THE GRANT’S PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE?

Do the expected measurable outcomes need to occur during the project period or can they be achieved after the project period is over, as long as the evaluation plan for achieving the outcomes is specified?

ANSWER TO Q 17

All outcomes and their associated indicators must occur within the project’s period of performance. This is necessary because the SCBGP is required to report on the results to OMB. Reporting of the project’s final

outcomes would be at the end of the project, not annually. Annual reports must illustrate progress toward the completion of the project and its associated outcomes.

Q 18 - HOW ARE MISCELLANEOUS OUTCOME MEASURES APPROVED?

What will the approval process be for **Miscellaneous Outcome Measures**?

ANSWER TO Q 18

We encourage you and your sub-applicants to determine the outcome measure(s) and indicator(s) based on the existing listing in the OMB approved SCBGP Evaluation Plan. Rarely, there may be outlier projects that may not fit into this mold. These projects will be handled during the SCBGP's application review on a case-by-case basis by the Grants Management Specialist, who may consult with the AMS, SCBGP Team Lead to determine the result of this proposal.

When possible, the SCBGP staff will try to align the project's miscellaneous measures with an existing outcome measure and indicator and encourage you to revise your application.

If the project is truly an outlier and it is necessary to use a miscellaneous outcome measure, then the SCBGP staff will approve the outcome measure and monitor for other projects with similar purposes.

Please note that submitting a Miscellaneous Outcome Measure may add more time and effort to the application submission and review process.

Q 19 - WHAT HAPPENS IF MY OUTCOME IS NOT ONE OF THE EIGHT SPECIFIED OUTCOMES?

If an applicant can identify one of the eight specified outcomes but also has an additional outcome not included in the list, where should s/he discuss this outcome? Would it be a Miscellaneous Outcome Measure or something to include as an Objective?

ANSWER TO Q 19

If the applicant has a Miscellaneous Outcome Measure in addition to the outcome measures listed in the SCBGP's Evaluation Plan, you may list this outcome under the Miscellaneous Outcome Measure section.

Q 20 - CAN WE USE SCBGP FUNDS TO MONITOR THE COMPLETION OF THE PERFORMANCE MEASURES?

Are the states or their sub-applicants allowed to use grant funds to monitor the fulfillment of the outcomes and indicators?

ANSWER TO Q 20

Recipients/sub-recipients are allowed and encouraged to utilize SCBGP funds for program evaluation for a project's outcome measure(s). It has been SCBGP staff experience that generally the costs involved with program evaluation have not consumed a large percentage of the budget on a project basis.

BUDGET NARRATIVE

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Q 21 - CAN WE MODIFY THE FORMAT OF THE BUDGET NARRATIVE?

Do we need to use the exact format of budget summary? We ask applicants to present their budgets per year. Is it ok if we present them in our state plan this way?

ANSWER TO Q 21

You can modify the format of this section so long as all the required information is still included; however, we encourage you use the format presented in the template. Providing additional information or information in a different format may lead to more questions about the budget during the review and could lengthen the application approval.

Q 22 - CAN WE MODIFY THE TABLES IN THE BUDGET NARRATIVE?

Can we modify the tables in this section to include the justification and/or additional information for each cost that we require of our applicants?

ANSWER TO Q 22

You may change the tables in this section so long as all the required information is still included; however, we encourage you to minimize such modifications to lessen any confusion that might occur during the review processes.

Q 23 - WILL THE JUSTIFICATION SECTIONS REPLACE THE WORK PLAN?

Will the justification sections effectively replace the Work Plan in previous project profile templates?

ANSWER TO Q 23

Yes, we are using these sections to determine whether or not the costs are necessary for the completion of the project.

Q 24 - DOES THE TRAVEL CERTIFICATION MEAN THAT WE MUST USE THE FEDERAL OR STATE TRAVEL RATES?

Concerning the travel certification statement, does this mean that if our state has its own mileage reimbursement rate lower than the federal rate, we must use our state rate for all grantee reimbursements or can we allow grantees to be reimbursed at the federal rate as long as they aren't a state employee?

ANSWER TO Q 24

The travel certification statement requires the applicant/sub-applicant to certify that they will charge travel consistently with their own travel reimbursement policies as outlined in [2 CFR 200.474](#). Under such circumstances, you may use your own state's mileage rates so long as they meet the federal requirements. Many states will be more restrictive than the Federal travel requirements, which is fine, but they cannot be more lenient.

Q 25 - COULD STATES ADD THEIR OWN TRAVEL POLICY TO THE CURRENT TRAVEL CERTIFICATION STATEMENT?

You said you didn't want states to revise the language. States could add to the language but do not change the language regarding federal travel policy.

For example, if Arizona wanted to add language which indicates the applicant must adhere to Arizona state travel policies, this would be acceptable. Would this be correct?

[ANSWER TO Q 25](#)

Yes, this is correct.

Q 26 - WHAT IF WE DON'T KNOW THE TRAVEL DETAILS YET?

Applicants are not always able to provide the exact number of miles and dates of travel will occur for a project proposal. How can we best represent this in the proposal?

[ANSWER TO Q 26](#)

It is ok to not have the exact number of miles traveled and the associated dates. Whenever possible, these numbers should be provided because they help the SCBGP staff determine that the travel costs are reasonable and will occur within the project's period of performance. When it is not possible to provide the precise number of miles traveled or specific dates, it is important to provide an estimation of the miles traveled and provide a range of dates so that SCBGP staff can ensure that they are reasonable.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

OVERALL

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Q 27 - CAN WE "MIX AND MATCH" THE OUTCOMES AND INDICATORS?

Can we take indicators from one outcome and use them under another outcome. For example, using Indicator 8 from Outcome 5 and using it under Outcome 4.

[ANSWER TO Q 27](#)

You must not "mix and match" the outcomes and indicators mentioned in the [SCBGP's Performance Evaluation Plan](#). When you select an outcome measure, you must only use those indicators listed under that specific outcome. We strongly encourage you to find the best possible fit with the outcomes and indicators as presented.

Q 28 - CAN WE CREATE AN INDICATOR FOR AN ALREADY ESTABLISHED OUTCOME?

One of our applicants reported they are going to use an indicator which is different from what is listed under the outcome measures. Is this allowed?

[ANSWER TO Q 28](#)

No, the applicant must select one of the indicators that is listed with the specific outcome measure they selected. If the applicant would like to develop a different indicator, they would need to do so under the "miscellaneous outcome measures." All miscellaneous outcomes will need to receive approval of the SCBGP staff through the SCBGP application review process as indicated under *Q 18 - How are miscellaneous outcome measures approved?* of this document.

OUTCOME 1: ENHANCE THE COMPETITIVENESS OF SPECIALTY CROPS THROUGH INCREASED SALES

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Q 29 - WHAT IF OUR APPLICANTS REPORT THAT SALES DATA ISN'T AVAILABLE?

Some applicants are reporting that sales data isn't available. Some also report that they will not supply sales data with actual dollar amounts. How should we approach collecting this data when it may not be available?

ANSWER TO Q 29

The Office of Management and Budget has required that all marketing and promotion projects report on the dollar value and percentage increase in sales of one or more specialty crops in one or more States or foreign markets as a result of marketing and/or promotion activities.

The SCBGP understands that sales benchmark data may not be available at the outset of a project. The sales data can become available through the course of a project. Projects are required to report on the actual numbers associated with the outcome measures the final performance report. Interim (annual) performance reports only require the progress toward the completion of the outcome measures, not actual numbers.

Since this is a required outcome measure for all marketing and promotion projects, it would be appropriate for states to have the collection of this data as a requirement for participation with the SCBGP. This requirement may be incorporated as a condition into your sub-award agreement.

Q 30 - WHAT IF THE PROJECT DOESN'T REPORT SALES DATA BY THE END OF THE PROJECT?

What would happen if a state funds a project that indicated they would provide sales data but by the end of the project does not provide any sales data?

ANSWER TO Q 30

If a recipient or subrecipient indicated that they would collect and provide sales data in their project proposal and then not provide any sales data at the end of the project, the project's performance reports must sufficiently describe the project staff's effort to positively collect and provide the sales data. We understand that some projects may not be successful; however, it is everyone's responsibility to monitor the performance of each project to help assure the success of its implemented under the SCBGP.

If it is found that the recipient or subrecipient intentionally did not collect or provide the sales data as described in the accepted project proposal, it would be considered a violation of your agreement with the SCBGP. You are accountable to AMS for the performance of awarded and subawarded projects and the appropriate expenditure of Federal funds by all parties under your grant agreement. A violation of your grant agreement with AMS may require the use of remedies for noncompliance as provided under [2 CFR 200.338](#).

Q 31 - HOW DO WE COLLECT THE DATA ILLUSTRATING THE INCREASE IN SALES?

If a project has a broad audience in a general promotion campaign by bill boards/PSA's etc., where would we get the before and after for cost and percentage indicators? What if there is no way of knowing the starting amount of sales and the impact of the promotional campaign? I can't imagine a lot of producers willing to give out their financial data.

ANSWER TO Q 31

The recipient or subrecipient will determine how to collect the data to report on the outcomes and indicators. This must be discussed in the *Data Collection to Report on Outcomes and Indicators* subsection of the *Expected Measurable Outcomes*. You must have a way to measure the performance of your marketing and promotional project that aligns with the [SCBGP Performance Evaluation Plan](#). If the marketing and promotion project cannot measure its performance using Outcome 1, which is mandatory for all marketing and promotion project, then it cannot be funded by the SCBGP.

It would be advisable to coordinate with someone, a professional evaluator or marketing specialist with experience in evaluating the success of marketing and promotion projects, to determine the most effective way to establish before and after dollar values and percentage increase in sales of one or more specialty crops as a result of the marketing and/or promotion activities.

Q 32 - CAN WE USE NASS DATA TO DETERMINE THE CHANGE OR INCREASE IN SPECIALTY CROP SALES?

If there is no one contracted as a base indicator, would you suggest we use National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) data if available to determine these amounts?

ANSWER TO Q 32

You are not required to provide a base indicator until you report on the completion of the project in the final performance report, which could be up to 3 years after the start date of your grant agreement. You can establish this base indicator as you implement the project; however, you must have a base indicator that is applicable for your project's outcome measure.

For projects that do not already have a baseline of sales in dollars, one of the objectives of the project must be to determine such a baseline in order to meet the requirement to document the value of sales increases by the end of the project.