



NFWF



## MIDWEST COVER CROP INITIATIVE 2022 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Full Proposal Due Date: **Monday, March 28, 2022 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time**

### OVERVIEW

In partnership with ADM and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) is undertaking a new initiative to support large-scale, voluntary adoption of cover crops across the Midwest. NFWF will award grants to organizations that will increase acres of cover crops in corn, soybean and wheat systems by providing farmers with technical and financial support. This initiative aims to enhance soil health, reduce atmospheric greenhouse gases, and improve water resources while providing economic benefits to participating farmers and maximizing benefits to wildlife. Grantees will: 1) provide farmers with technical assistance on planting cover crops and enrolling in applicable federal, state and local government financial assistance programs; 2) develop multi-year contracts with farmers who elect to receive payments from ADM for cover crop plantings that will occur in 2022 and continue on an annual basis through the contract term; 3) coordinate ADM payments to participating farmers at an annual rate of \$10 per acre; and 4) monitor and report environmental and economic outcomes. Farmers may receive payments from ADM in addition to financial assistance through the Farm Bill or other applicable public programs. Grant funding requested through this opportunity will support grantee expenses; farmer payments will be supported with separate funding from ADM and will not be included in grant budgets. Projects that deliver large cover crop acreages (tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of acres) in 2022 on a cost-competitive basis will have a competitive advantage in the grant selection process. Approximately \$2.5 million in grant funding is available under this funding opportunity. Proposals must be submitted online ([easygrants.nfwf.org](https://easygrants.nfwf.org)) by March 28.

### GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

Grant funding will support cover crop work on lands in active corn, soybean and/or wheat systems in the following states:

- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- Nebraska
- North Dakota
- Ohio

### REQUIRED SCOPE OF WORK

Grant funding will support projects that include the following required elements.

#### Outreach and Technical Assistance

Grantees will conduct targeted outreach and technical assistance to increase farmer adoption of cover crops and other beneficial practices, such as conservation tillage, crop rotations, and reduced fertilizer application. Grantees will help farmers navigate agronomic, economic and social factors that can pose barriers to adoption. Grantees will help design and implement strategies for practice adoption that make

sense for the farmer while providing benefits for wildlife, soil health, greenhouse gas reduction, and water quantity and quality. Grantees will facilitate and increase farmer participation in Farm Bill conservation programs as well as other applicable state or local government financial assistance opportunities. In addition, grantees will provide farmers with opportunities for learning and interaction that help build and expand farmer-to-farmer peer networks. As part of the required approach, grantees will:

- Conduct phone consultations and in-person meetings to engage and assist farmers with adoption of cover crops and other beneficial practices.
- Hold a minimum of one field day per year as a forum for farmers to learn about benefits and practical lessons associated with practice adoption.
- Produce and regularly distribute educational materials on cover crops and other soil health practices.
- Promote cover crop approaches designed to maximize benefits to wildlife, by providing guidance on topics including but not limited to wildlife-friendly seed mixes, timing of planting and termination, and planting methods.
- Ensure practices implemented through this initiative meet NRCS standards and specifications.

### Contract Development

Farmers planting cover crops in association with this initiative will have the option of entering a contract to receive annual payments from ADM on a per-acre basis. Grantees will develop and enter into multi-year contracts, up to 4 years in duration, that include ADM and participating farmers. Each contract will apply to cover crop plantings completed in 2022 and to be continued annually through the term of the contract. ADM will pay individual farmers for planting cover crops, with annual payments of \$10 per acre for each year of the contract, up to 4 years, for a total maximum potential per-acre payment of \$40. Entering into such a contract with the grantee and ADM will not preclude a farmer from receiving additional financial assistance for the same acres through Farm Bill or other applicable public programs. However, those acres will not be eligible for payment from other private sources for the term of the contract. As part of the contract, participating farmers will agree not to sell carbon benefits (e.g., credits) associated with the enrolled cover crop acres and will withhold carbon benefits from the market for the term of the contract.

### Payment Coordination

ADM will make payments to participating farmers with funding that is separate from the grants awarded under this funding opportunity (i.e., grant budgets will not include funding for farmer payments and will reflect only grantee project expenses). Grantees will provide ADM with the farmer business information required to accomplish financial transactions. As cover crop plantings are completed, grantees will compile and present ADM with farmer payment requests in a format to be provided by NFWF. Prior to submitting farmer payment requests to ADM, grantees will verify on-the-ground implementation. Verification methods may include receipts, photos, site visits or other relevant approaches.

### Outcomes Monitoring and Reporting

Grantees will monitor and evaluate environmental and economic outcomes of practice adoption on farms that receive ADM payments. Farmers choosing to receive payments from ADM will be required to complete a production survey. ADM will enter production data into a data management platform. ADM and grantees will not disclose or otherwise share any farmer data except in aggregated form. Specifically, they will not disclose any data that identifies individual farmers. Grantees will analyze farm data collected

through the production survey to assess changes in farmer costs associated with adopting cover crops and other practices.

Grantees will promote the use of COMET-Farm and COMET-Planner to track carbon benefits associated with practice implementation. For farms receiving payments from ADM, grantees will use Field to Market metrics and methodology to analyze and report outputs and synthesize them with analyses of economic data in an annual report. Grantees will share analyses with farmers to help inform adoption and modification of these practices.

Grantees will participate in monthly check-in calls with NFWF and project partners to provide updates on project status. The first annual report will be due to NFWF on January 31, 2023.

## PROJECT METRICS

The Easygrants application includes a list of standard metric options for describing project impacts and reporting outcomes (Table 1). All applicants are required to indicate the number of acres to be planted in cover crops (**metric name: Acres with cover crops**). This metric refers to the total unique acres of cover crops to be planted in 2022 and to be continued in subsequent years. In other words, it reflects the acres to be covered under the farmer contracts with ADM identified and agreed upon in 2022. It does not reflect additional/different acres to be planted in the current year, such as acres participating in carbon credit markets, or different acres to be planted in future years. Support for planting additional/different acres in subsequent years may be offered through a future funding opportunity. NFWF will also require an outcomes tracking spreadsheet to be submitted with the proposal and progress reports.

In addition to the required cover crops metric, applicants have the option of selecting additional metrics offered within the Easygrants application. Applicants should select only the metrics most relevant to their proposed projects.

NFWF encourages projects that engage organizations and producers in one or more of the NRCS' Underserved and Special Emphasis categories. Applicants are encouraged to use the metrics notes fields to indicate the extent that the overall values for the # people and # jobs metrics are expected to include people in the [Underserved](#) or [Special Emphasis](#) categories.

Table 1. Standard metrics available for selection in the application. (List continued on next page)

Strategy	Metric	Instructions
Habitat Management	<b>Acres with cover crops (Required)</b>	Enter the number of acres with cover crops to be planted in 2022 and then continued in subsequent years.
	Acres of project footprint	Enter the total number of acres impacted by one or more project conservation activities. Only count an acre once, even if multiple activities or treatments will occur on that acre during the project.
	Acres with conservation tillage	Enter the number of acres with conservation tillage.
	Acres with enhanced nutrient management	Enter the number of cropland acres with enhanced nutrient management practices other than or in addition to conservation tillage or cover crops. Please describe the nutrient management practices in the NOTES section.

Table 1 continued. Standard metrics available for selection in the application.

Strategy	Metric	Instructions
Habitat Management	Acres with managed grazing	Enter the number of acres with managed grazing (i.e., promoting plant growth above and below ground, improving wildlife habitat, and maximizing soil carbon through grazing). Please describe the grazing practices in the NOTES section.
	Lbs N avoided (annually)	Enter the amount of nitrogen prevented from entering system annually and indicate method of calculating reduction in NOTES section.
	Lbs P avoided (annually)	Enter the amount of phosphorous prevented from entering system annually and indicate method of calculating reduction in NOTES section.
	Lbs sediment avoided (annually)	Enter the amount of sediment prevented from entering system annually and indicate method of calculating reduction in NOTES section.
	# BMPs implemented	Enter the number of BMPs implemented. In the NOTES section, specify the percentage of BMPs implemented out of the total recommendations developed.
Planning, Research, Monitoring	# mgmt plans with BMPs	Enter the number of completed management plans that incorporate Best Management Practices (BMPs).
Capacity, Outreach, Incentives	# jobs created	Enter the number of new jobs created. If applicable, in the NOTES section report the number of new jobs created for people in the Historically Underserved or Special Emphasis categories.
	# jobs sustained	Enter the number of jobs sustained. If applicable, in the NOTES section report the number of jobs sustained for people in the Historically Underserved or Special Emphasis categories.
	# people reached	Enter the number of people who responded to an offer of outreach, training, or technical assistance. In the NOTES, specify the percent of people reached out of the total targeted. If applicable, note the number of people in the Historically Underserved or Special Emphasis categories.
	# participants receiving gov't agency cost share or financial assistance	Enter the number of participants enrolled in government cost share or financial assistance programs. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP) and if applicable note the number of participants in the Historically Underserved or Special Emphasis categories.
	Acres covered by government agency cost share or financial assistance	Enter the number of acres enrolled in government agency cost share or financial assistance. In the NOTES section, specify which program(s) (e.g., NRCS EQIP). If applicable,

	number should be equal to or less than “Acreage of project footprint” metric.
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## **ELIGIBILITY**

### **Eligible and Ineligible Entities**

- Eligible applicants include non-profit 501(c) organizations, state government agencies, local governments, municipal governments, tribal governments and organizations, and educational institutions. To be competitive, applicant organizations must demonstrate capacity and experience commensurate with the scale of the project being proposed and the funding being requested.
- Individuals, federal government agencies, and for-profit entities are not eligible to apply for grant funding.

### **Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds**

- **Equipment:** Applicants are encouraged to rent equipment where possible and cost-effective or use matching funds to make those purchases. NFWF acknowledges, however, that some projects may only be completed using NFWF funds to procure equipment. If this applies to your project, please contact the program staff listed in this RFP to discuss options.
- Federal funds and matching contributions may not be used to procure or obtain equipment, services, or systems (including entering into or renewing a contract) that uses telecommunications equipment or services produced by Huawei Technologies Company or ZTE Corporation (or any subsidiary or affiliate of such entities) as a substantial or essential component, or as critical technology of any system. Refer to Public Law 115-232, section 889 for additional information.
- NFWF funds and matching contributions may not be used to support political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities or Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.
- NFWF funds may not be used to support ongoing efforts to comply with legal requirements, including permit conditions, mitigation and settlement agreements. However, grant funds may be used to support projects that enhance or improve upon existing baseline compliance efforts.
- Funds may not be used to provide technical assistance for Regional Conservation Partnership Program projects.

## **FUNDING AVAILABILITY**

NFWF anticipates awarding up to \$2.5 million in grant funding under this funding opportunity. This amount reflects the funding available to support grantee activities as outlined in the scope of work. ADM will make the annual \$10/acre payments to participating farmers with other funding separate from the available grant funding.

Applicants are encouraged to propose the maximum number of acres they can deliver in 2022, and application budgets should reflect the funding needed for cost-effective delivery of those acres. Typical grant awards will range from \$200,000 to \$600,000.

## **PROJECT PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE**

The recommended period of performance to specify in the application is June 1, 2022 to March 31, 2026. This period encompasses time to: 1) develop farmer contracts in 2022; 2) monitor and report on planting

activities under contracts that are potentially up to 4 years in duration; and 3) coordinate farmer payment requests through the duration of the farmer contracts.

Timing of grant agreement finalization may not allow sufficient time to hire new position(s) to accomplish the scope of work required for 2022. As such, grantees may need to be prepared to rely on existing staff for delivery of project outcomes, at least in the first year.

## **MATCHING CONTRIBUTIONS**

This funding opportunity does not require matching contributions. However, if readily available, matching contributions may make a project more competitive. Matching contributions may include cash, in-kind contributions of staff and volunteer time, work performed, materials and services donated, or other tangible contributions to the project objectives and outcomes. In addition, eligible indirect costs (that would not be paid with requested grant funding) may be applied as match. More information about using indirect costs as match can be found using [this link](#). Eligible matching contributions must be spent or applied between the start and end dates indicated in the application.

## **EVALUATION CRITERIA**

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness and compliance with NFWF and funding source policies. Proposals will then be evaluated based on the extent to which they meet the following criteria.

**Priorities** – Project contributes to the funding opportunity priorities and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics to evaluate project success. Competitive projects will deliver large acreages on a cost-competitive basis.

*NRCS Coordination* – Please ensure the project is in alignment with NRCS goals and priorities by conferring with the NRCS State Conservationist and their staff in the state in which your project is located. A list of NRCS state contacts can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

**Technical Merit** – Project is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth a clear, logical and achievable work plan and timeline. Project engages appropriate technical experts throughout project planning, design and implementation.

**Partnership and Community Impact** – The applicant organization partners and engages collaboratively with diverse local community members, leaders, community-based organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to develop and implement the proposed project. This ensures long-term sustainability and success of the project, integration into local programs and policies, and community acceptance of proposed restoration actions. Non-traditional partners or communities are enlisted to broaden the sustained impact from the project.

**Budget** – Costs are allowable, reasonable and budgeted in accordance with NFWF’s [Budget Instructions](#) cost categories. Federally funded projects comply with [OMB Uniform Guidance](#) as applicable.

**Cost-Effectiveness** – Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Cost-effectiveness evaluation may include, but is not limited to, an assessment of either or both direct and indirect costs in the proposed budget. The federal government has determined that a *de minimis* 10% indirect rate is an acceptable minimum for organizations without a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), as such NFWF reserves the right to scrutinize **ALL** proposals with indirect rates above 10% for cost-effectiveness.

**Transferability and Expansion** – Project has potential to apply lessons learned to other communities and catalyze broader practice adoption.

**Communication** – Project includes a plan to communicate information about the project to appropriate audiences.

**Funding Need** – Project establishes a clear need for the funds being requested, and demonstrates that activities would not move forward absent funding.

**Monitoring** – Project includes a plan for tracking progress and reporting outcomes to NFWF.

**Long-term Sustainability** – Project will be conducted to ensure benefits are achieved and sustained over time.

**Past Success** – Applicant has a proven track record of success in implementing other relevant projects with specific, measurable results.

**Partnership** – Relationships are in place to implement the project and the project is supported by relevant stakeholders, constituents and communities. Project identifies key partners (including potential or contemplated subawards to third party subrecipients of the applicant), the roles they will play in implementation, and how this project will build new or enhance existing partnerships. (Note: a project partner is any local community, non-profit organization, tribe, and/or local, state, and federal government agency that contributes to the project in a substantial way and is closely involved in project completion.)

## **OTHER**

**Applicant Demographic Information** – In an effort to better understand diversity in our grantmaking, NFWF is collecting basic information on applicants and their communities via a voluntary survey form (available in Easygrants). This information will not be shared externally or with reviewers. For more details, please see the tip sheet and the Uploads section of Easygrants.

**Procurement** – If the applicant chooses to identify specific proposed Contractor(s) for Services, an award by NFWF to the applicant does not constitute NFWF's express written authorization for the applicant to procure such specific services noncompetitively. When procuring goods and services, NFWF recipients must follow documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable laws and regulations.

**Publicity and Acknowledgment of Support** – Award recipients will be required to grant NFWF and ADM the right and authority to publicize the project and NFWF's financial support for the grant in press releases, publications and other public communications. Recipients may also be asked by NFWF and/or ADM to provide high-resolution (minimum 300 dpi) photographs depicting the project.

**Receiving Award Funds** – Award payments are primarily reimbursable. Grantees may request funds for reimbursement at any time after completing a signed agreement with NFWF. A request of an advance of funds must be due to an imminent need of expenditure and must detail how the funds will be used and provide justification and a timeline for expected disbursement of these funds.

**Compliance Requirements** – Projects selected may be subject to requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act (state and federal), and National Historic Preservation Act. Documentation of compliance with these regulations must be approved prior to initiating activities that disturb or alter habitat or other features of the project site(s). Applicants should budget time and resources to obtain the needed approvals. As applicable, successful applicants may be required to comply with additional Federal, state or local requirements and obtain all necessary permits and clearances.

**Federal Funding** – The availability of federal funds estimated in this solicitation is contingent upon the federal appropriations process. Funding decisions will be made based on level of funding and timing of when it is received by NFWF.

**Underserved/Special Emphasis Categories** –The historically underserved farmer and rancher categories include those with limited resources, beginning farmers/ranchers, socially disadvantaged (American Indians or Alaska Natives, Asians, Blacks or African Americans, Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders, and Hispanics) and veterans. More information on the underserved categories can be found [here](#). The special emphasis categories are American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian American, Black, Disability, Women, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Hispanic, and Veterans. More information on the special emphasis categories can be found [here](#).

## **FUNDING OPPORTUNITY WEBINAR**

NFWF will host a webinar on Wednesday, February 23, 2022 at 11:00 AM–12:00 PM ET. This webinar will provide additional information on the current funding opportunity, provide additional guidance on the application process, and provide answers to participant questions. Webinar participants can register using [this link](#).

## **TIMELINE**

Dates of activities are subject to change. Please check the [Midwest Cover Crop Initiative](#) program page on the NFWF website for the most current dates and information.

Applicant Webinar:	Wednesday, February 23 <sup>th</sup> , 2022 at 11:00 AM ET
Full Proposals Due:	Monday, March 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2022 by 11:59 PM ET
Review Period:	March–May 2022
Awards Announced	Late May 2022

After award announcements, NFWF staff will work with grantees to prepare grant agreements and other necessary paperwork, all of which will be completed electronically using the Easygrants system. Additional information about the grantee’s organization and its finances may be solicited during this time. Once grant agreements are finalized, funds will typically be paid to grantees on a reimbursable basis. Funds may be advanced to qualified grantees on an as-needed basis.

## **HOW TO APPLY**

All application materials must be submitted online through NFWF’s Easygrants system.

1. Go to [easygrants.nfwf.org](https://easygrants.nfwf.org) to register in NFWF’s Easygrants online system. New users to the system will be prompted to register before starting the application (if you already are a registered user, use your existing login). Enter your applicant information. Please disable the pop-up blocker on your internet browser prior to beginning the application process.
2. Once on your homepage, click the “Apply for Funding” button and select *Midwest Cover Crop Initiative 2022* from the list of options.
3. Follow the instructions in Easygrants to complete your application. Once an application has been started, it may be saved and returned to at a later time for completion and submission.



## APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

A *Tip Sheet* is available for quick reference while you are working through your application. This document can be downloaded [here](#).

Additional information to support the application process can be accessed on the NFWF website's [Applicant Information](#) page.

For more information or questions about this funding opportunity, please contact:

Todd Hogrefe,  
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Central Regional Office  
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612-564-7286

Bridget Collins  
Program Director,  
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202-595-2655

For issues or assistance with our online Easygrants system, please contact the Easygrants Helpdesk:

Email: [easygrants@nfwf.org](mailto:easygrants@nfwf.org)

Voicemail: 202-595-2497

Hours: 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM ET, Monday–Friday.

Include: your name, proposal ID #, email address, phone number, program you are applying to, and a description of the issue.