

FY21 Joint Chiefs' Webinar

August 6, 2020

Q&A Follow-Up Compilation

1. Can you provide the link to the Joint Chief SharePoint that includes examples of past Joint Chief projects?

There isn't a SharePoint site, but the public-facing website that includes project descriptions and locations, past project funding, and accomplishment reports of completed projects is available here: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/features/?cid=stelprdb1244394>

Submission Process:

2. Does leadership concurrence have to be in the form of signature within the proposal? Such as State Forester?

Required signatures are indicated on the signature page of the Narrative Template. This includes NRCS District Conservationist, NRCS State Conservationist, USFS Forest Supervisor, USFS Regional Forester, and State Forester (from the respective state agency). Please use the updated Narrative Template dated 7/16/20.

3. Please clarify the shared mailbox?

The shared mailbox is new for FY21. NRCS and USFS national program leads have access to this mailbox. By having a single mailbox, it will streamline the process of proposal submission and review.

4. Can shared mailbox be used for questions also, or just submittals?

Questions about the Joint Chiefs' solicitation process can be sent to the shared mailbox or directly to Martin, Matthew, Clint, or Dana.

5. If there is the shared mailbox, does that mean that official correspondence is not required from the Regional Foresters Office?

The shared mailbox is the mode of submission. The shared mailbox is not intended to change the policies, processes, or protocols of any office.

General Funding:

6. What about applications that include the primary FS component is the use of funds on private land using the Wyden Authority and the use of EQUIP funding on private land.

We could use clarification on this question, but this approach is something we have seen and supported in the past. Cross boundary work is one of the key pieces we look for in these projects. If you want to talk in more detail in this, please don't hesitate to reach out to Dana Skelly or Ben Harms for the FS and Matthew Vandersande for NRCS.

7. Will you speak to the balance between funds requested from both agencies? I recall we saw considerably more funds requested from FS than NRCS last year.

There is no expectation that there will be a perfect balance, or 50-50 split, between the fund requests for each proposal. In previous years there were several proposals that were close to a 90-10 split. These are very unbalanced and fall short of the landscape-scale cross-boundary coordination that is desired. A well-balanced proposal will be more competitive than an unbalanced one.

8. Can we expect limited funding for the first year of new proposals? As in the past few? Yes, at present funding for Joint Chiefs remains flat to FY20 levels in terms of available funds.

9. Are these funds available to partners in assisting with the project? These funds can be made available to partners through agreements as allowed for those fund codes outside of Joint Chiefs work.

10. For the FY 22 projects, is funding expected to be available October 1 if we're operating under a Continuing Resolution

The allocation and apportionment of funding would depend upon the details of that particular Continuing Resolution. The goal is to fund the projects as soon as funding is available.

USFS Funding:

11. We are still waiting on clarification for who pays for bringing in detailers/extra resources under budget modernization, i.e. it is supposedly paid for already in salary and expenses, but if we bring in a crew from out of region, is their budget paying for it or is ours? That will be a big part of many proposals.

Salary and expenses are covered by the host unit in the new budget modernization structure. Therefore, entities coming from one region to another to support mission critical work will be funded by their hosting unit. We are working on clarification as to how this applies to travel and overtime and will share that information as it becomes available. Please work to estimate how much of your previous projects relied on these types of funds with specific amounts to specific needs (e.g., split for travel, premium pay) to help guide us in this new process.

12. Does the process bring additional prioritization for contracting resources? No. That is up to the proposing unit.

13. Can we purchase equipment or supplies such as herbicide or UTV? Yes.

14. Any word on the availability of State and Private Funds in FY21? We expect these funds to be flat to FY20 levels at this time.

15. Can we request funds for salary for employees to work outside of their tour to assist with pile burning during winter? No, no S&E work will be covered with awarded JC funds.

16. Contracting is a limitation for the FS. If we get joint chief's money we would need AQM prioritization to actually get contracts through. It's a standstill.

Thank you for this feedback, it is not true in all regions and is something we will watch with AQM centralization.

17. While you guys said don't budget in salary, what about the bulk of our workforce that conduct force account thinning, our 13/13s and 18/8s?

At this time, all workforce funding is allocated through S&E BLIs and there is no ability to add to that through Joint Chief's awarded projects.

18. Does salary include seasonal employees? Or would 1039 seasonals be part of the proposal?

No, they are included in S&E.

19. The bulk of our RX work is conducting outside normal tours of duty for our seasonal employees. We rely on NFHF funds to fund them beyond their tour of duty? Does this program fund that? It's the cost of RX for the most part.

At this time, no S&E will be included in awarded Joint Chiefs funding.

NRCS Funding:

20. Should agency Technical Assistance \$ be included in the budget table (as in the past) thought I saw to NOT include TA.

We are requesting only EQIP financial assistance in the budget section of the proposal.

Timing:

21. Do projects approved have to resubmit for year 2, 3 etc.?

No. Projects are selected based on the duration of the proposal, up to three years. While there is no guarantee of funding for all three years because of the annual appropriations, the goal is to fund at the requested budget levels.

22. Can implementation extend beyond the 3 years? Do funds need to be expended or obligated?

Potentially. Funds need to be obligated in the same year that they are allocated. Funding is limited to three years. However, a contract or agreement could potentially extend past the three years.

23. Does all of the actual on the groundwork need to be completed within 3 years?

Funding is limited to a maximum of three years. Those funds need to be obligated in the year they are allocated. Contracts and agreements could extend past those three years.

Proposal Review:

24. Will new projects be evaluated higher than projects that are reapplications for a previously funded JC project area?

Each proposal is evaluated individually on its merits.

25. If a landscape overlaps with and is receiving funding from other competitive funding efforts such as CFLRA for USFS or CIS for NRCS will this affect the rating of a proposal?

No.

Firesheds:

26. Can you clarify the need to discuss project alignment priority firesheds? Can you clarify the relation, if any, between the fs top 10 priority fire sheds and Joint Chiefs' objectives and evaluation criteria? There aren't many in the east.

As an agency, we need to show how we are strategically treating our highest priority areas with limited resources. Our stakeholders and the legislature expect that. The firesheds are one way to illustrate priority areas based on exposure, primarily for structures, to wildfires. We have at all levels been engaging with stakeholders and partners to define priority treatment and maintenance areas. If your priority project areas are defined using something other than firesheds, that is fine. Please explain what you are using to define this as a priority treatment area in project proposals.

27. Is there a link to information on and/or mapping of the firesheds that can be shared?

The fireshed maps are available here:

<https://usfs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d060c2db98c4454aba39b1008616eb93>

Joint Chiefs' Objectives:

28. Can you speak more to the weighting of the objectives during evaluation? Were you saying that one objective will be weighted more than others? If so, can you share how they will be weighted? please clarify - Matthew said # of objectives are considered or not considered in scoring? did he mean one objective weighs more than others?

The three objectives are viewed equal in their importance. The weighting discussed in the presentation was with respect to the numeric scoring and calculations of the proposals. In short, a proposal won't be penalized if it only addresses one or two of the Joint Chiefs' objectives. Addressing all three objectives in a proposal, is encouraged, but not required. The three objectives are usually complementary, but this may vary with the project location. In the past, proposals were submitted that did a great job addressing two objectives, but a poor job addressing the third. Those proposals seemed to add the third objective because they thought it was required and did so only superficially. With limited funding available, we want the proposal to focus on that landscape's resource concerns. In other words, we would prefer that a project does a great job addressing one or two objectives rather than a mediocre job addressing all three.

29. Will you speak to the connection to Shared Stewardship?

The Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership has embodied Shared Stewardship since 2014. If a proposal is aligned with a signed Share Stewardship Agreement in that state, then that is fantastic. If your state doesn't have a signed Shared Stewardship Agreement, then that won't be held against the proposal so long as the proposal embraces the goals of the partnership.

Partners:

30. No requirement to substantiate match as part of the proposal?

There is no requirement. We are taking you at your word that the amounts and partners are accurate. The partner contributions will also need to be reported in the final project report after year three.

31. Can we count other grants for fuel treatments by partners (county) in the contributions?

If these grant funds will be within the project boundary and supporting the same project at the same time, then yes.

32. How can our collaboratives and partners best communicate their support for the proposal without letters of support?

Partners and collaborators can best communicate their support for the proposal by being active in the design or implementation of the project. We are taking you at your word about their involvement. Their involvement will also need to be reported in the annual and final reports submitted the USFS WO and NRCS NHQ.

33. Are these funds available to partners in assisting with the project?

Funds are available to partners so long as any grants or agreements comply with the respective funding law, regulation, and policy. NRCS EQIP funds are primarily for financial assistance to landowners. A limited amount of technical assistance would be provided at the standard return percentage. This is similar for the USFS where Wyden authority is often used for cross boundary treatments.

34. If a partner would like to provide capacity support to achieve proposal deliverables (such as hiring a 3-year position), should that request be framed as being utilized through a USFS agreement? It sounds like NRCS funding through JCs will not really be available to partners, but USFS funds will. Just want to clarify how to request funding for a partner position or positions in a proposal.

Yes, that is correct, it would be through a USFS agreement.

35. How will education and outreach be evaluated given limitations due to COVID19?

We recognize the serious challenges posed by COVID-19 to conducting traditional education and outreach activities. We look forward to seeing what types of safe methods and approaches will be proposed (e.g., online virtual meetings).

36. How do we include pre-planning with landowners without knowing whether our proposal will be successful and funded or not? Are you suggesting that we conduct community outreach to garner interest, without having funding secured?

In previous years, proposals have described pre-planning activities ranging from informal discussions with individuals or community groups in a targeted location, to participation in local public planning

meetings. The approaches, methods, and timing will vary with the location and objectives. While not required, pre-planning is encouraged to maximize client participation in the first year of the project.

Materials:

37. Will this be recorded?

Will we be able to get a copy of this presentation?

It would be nice if this was made available for those who were not able to attend. It is helpful to hear your responses and, for those of us new to this JC proposal process, your responses are valuable!

Please share this with the Regional Coordinators or PDL of interested participants? There are many people not here that would like to hear the context.

We are referring people to the solicitation package as the set of reference materials. The solicitation package has more detail regarding the content of the proposal. If there are any follow-up questions, please don't hesitate to send them to Martin, Matthew, Clint, or Dana.