

**Frequently Asked Questions:  
U.S. Natural Climate Solutions Accelerator**

*ISSUE DATE:* February 14, 2020

**DEADLINE FOR PRE-PROPOSAL SUBMISSION: March 13th, 2020 (11:59 PM EST)**

**1. What is the U.S. Natural Climate Solutions Accelerator?**

Through the generous support of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, The Nature Conservancy launched the U.S. Natural Climate Solutions Accelerator program in 2018 to support projects with potential to substantially increase the use of natural climate solutions. This grant-funding program focuses on helping kick-start innovative and scalable approaches for reducing emissions and storing more carbon on natural and working lands in the United States. The program’s Steering Committee approved the first five grants in the fall of 2018, five additional grants were approved in the fall of 2019. The Committee is now accepting applications to the third round of grantmaking.

During the third round of grant making, applicants are asked to submit a pre-proposal no later than March 13th, 2020. Projects may request up to \$200,000 in funding. In addition to financial support, recipients will be offered mentorship, and connections to networks and new partnerships.

**2. Why are Natural Climate Solutions necessary and timely?**

In 2018 a new TNC-led study found that natural climate solutions—which include reforestation, cover crops, coastal wetland restoration, and other management practices could reduce emissions and increase sequestration in the land sector equal to 20 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions —the equivalent of removing all U.S. cars and trucks from the road. In addition to their climate mitigation benefits, natural climate solutions protect water supplies, improve soil health and productivity, provide wildlife habitat, buffer flood zones, create healthier communities and increase income for private landowners.

While significant progress is being made to expand adoption of renewable energy, electric vehicles and other technologies that reduce emissions from the energy and transportation sectors, the Accelerator program seeks to correspondingly increase adoption of the oldest, and one of the most cost-effective carbon capture technologies there is—nature. Over time, the Accelerator strives to support the development of a diverse portfolio strategies and mechanisms that landowners, state and federal governments, corporations, and other climate leaders can deploy to accelerate climate action.

**3. What is ‘NCS’?**

‘NCS’ is an acronym for Natural Climate Solutions

**4. Where can I learn more about NCS?**

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-insights/perspectives/a-natural-path-for-u-s-climate-action/>

**5. What is the funding range and scale of projects that the U.S. NCS Accelerator is looking for?**

The funding range is \$50,000-\$200,000, but the overall scale of the project can be much larger.

**6. How long is grant term?**

The grant term is 15-months.

**7. Am I eligible to apply?**

The U.S. NCS Accelerator will consider applications from 501(c)(3) not-for-profits.

## 8. How do I apply?

You may submit a pre-proposal on the U.S. NCS Accelerator website: [www.nature.org/ncsaccelerator](http://www.nature.org/ncsaccelerator). You can preview application materials here:

The pre-proposal form:

[https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/US\\_NCS\\_Accelerator\\_Round\\_3\\_Pre-Proposal\\_Form\\_2020.pdf](https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/US_NCS_Accelerator_Round_3_Pre-Proposal_Form_2020.pdf)

The full proposal draft:

[https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/US\\_NCS\\_Accelerator\\_Round\\_3\\_Full\\_Proposal\\_Template\\_Draft\\_3mar20.pdf](https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/US_NCS_Accelerator_Round_3_Full_Proposal_Template_Draft_3mar20.pdf)

The scoring rubric draft used to evaluate full proposals:

[https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/US\\_NCS\\_Accelerator\\_Round\\_3\\_Scoring\\_Rubric\\_Draft\\_27feb20.pdf](https://www.nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/US_NCS_Accelerator_Round_3_Scoring_Rubric_Draft_27feb20.pdf)

## 9. How will winners be selected?

Pre-proposals from eligible entities who have completed the online form in full prior to the due date will be reviewed, and those short listed will be invited to submit a full proposal. Full proposals will then be reviewed and finalists will be selected by the Steering Committee. The finalization of all awards shall be subject to agreement to terms and signing of a formal grant agreement with TNC.<sup>1</sup>

The [selection committee](#) will evaluate projects based on their assessment of:

1. the potential for delivering significant climate change mitigation benefits;
2. likelihood of reaching transformative scale; and
3. the capability of project partners to achieve success.

## 10. Can you provide additional guidance on the types of projects the Committee is seeking?

The selection committee is interested in receiving proposals from a diverse portfolio of projects representing novel approaches for scaling climate solutions in a range of natural and working lands (forests, agricultural lands and grasslands, and wetlands) and geographies. Above all else, projects should clearly and concisely articulate the NCS benefits of the project with a roadmap to scalability, investability, replicability, and/or leveragability.

The Committee seeks diverse multi-disciplinary teams that have support from the partners and stakeholders needed to be engaged to be successful during the 15-month grant term as well as to get to scale. The program encourages innovative ideas, such as forging new collaborations, engagement of novel partners and stakeholders, creation of new incentives, development of new mechanisms delivering additionality, innovative monetization of carbon sequestration, furthering demand creation, and expanding the potential of 'niche' NCS pathways.

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<sup>1</sup> Qualified applicants will receive consideration without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, sex, marital status, religion, ancestry, mental or physical handicap, or age.

Proposals involving offsets should not simply utilize existing protocols rather be focused on expanding the overall market. The program does not fund basic research unless it is part of a project with integrated scaling strategies and the program will not fund purchase of equipment.

**11. What do you mean by scalability, investability, replicability, and/or leveragability.?**

You will be asked to provide a detailed roadmap for how the project could be scaled, attract investment, be replicated, and/or leveraged to a landscape scale. For example, if attracting additional investment to your project is part of your scaling plan, provide details of where you anticipate you will get the funding and how it will be utilized for growth. If replication by others is key to your project, be explicit as to how would you promote the pilot to ensure that other organizations, businesses, communities, and/or states can readily replicate your approach? If the project involves leveraging outcomes through changes in policies and/or best management practices, how will you engage corporate, governmental entities, and/or landowners to ensure success?

**12. Will I be competing against applicants from The Nature Conservancy or other members of the steering committee?**

This is an open grant competition and steering committee members are eligible to participate. That said, the intent of the program is to support a broad portfolio of scalable NCS approaches from different organizations, entity types, geographies, and a range of land management practices. The Steering Committee members are required to recuse themselves regarding commenting and voting on any proposals submitted by their organization.

**13. Are there examples of projects that are eligible for this program?**

First and second round awardees' pilot projects can be seen in the "Previous Awardees" section of the U.S. NCS Accelerator website [www.nature.org/ncsaccelerator](http://www.nature.org/ncsaccelerator). The Accelerator is open to making awards to a wide range of NCS approaches so long as there is clear roadmap to future scalability, investability, replicability, or leveragability.

**14. Can you provide more guidance on how to estimate climate change mitigation benefits (Aggregate tCO<sub>2e</sub>) and costs (Average \$/tCO<sub>2e</sub>)?**

To the best of their ability, applicants should estimate the aggregate climate mitigation benefits that could be achieved assuming the project is successful and scaled to the maximum reasonable extent over 10 years. These estimates can be formal (i.e. based on standards, methodologies, and protocols) or more informal "best guesses" depending on the applicant and the type of project being proposed. Either way, applicants should "show their work" and explain key assumptions so that they can be understood and validated. Additional resources can be found in the links below:

U.S. State Mapper from Nature4Climate  
<https://nature4climate.org/u-s-carbon-mapper/>

Comet Planner from U.S. Department of Agriculture / Colorado State University  
<http://comet-planner.com/>

Tools for carbon inventory, management, and reporting from U.S. Forest Service  
<https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/carbon/tools/>

Forest Carbon Map from the Trust for Public Land and American Forests  
<https://dev.tplgis.org/carbonmap/>

Marginal Abatement Cost Tool from NDC Partnership  
<http://ndcpartnership.org/content/marginal-abatement-cost-tool-mactool%C2%A0>

**15. How far along should a project be?**

Awards will be considered for projects across all stages of development that can demonstrate measurable outcomes during the 15-month grant term with a clear roadmap to get to scale during or beyond the 15-month term.

**16. Can I apply more than one time?**

Yes, applicants from previous rounds can reapply. In any given round an entity may also submit more than one pre-proposal to the US NCS Accelerator should they have multiple eligible projects.

**17. How do you define activities, deliverables, and outcomes?**

*Activities* are actions that will be undertaken as part of the project. *Deliverables* are the work products that will be completed during the 15-month grant term. *Outcomes* are the quantitative and qualitative results from the project.

**18. Can supplemental information be attached as an appendix?**

Applicants are requested to submit maps and letters of support from listed partners. These are optional during the pre-proposal but will be required if the project is selected to submit a full proposal. Supplemental documentation (further explanation of the project, organizational charts, etc.) may be provided in additional appendices though these materials may or may not be considered by the Steering Committee.

**19. How will the progress be evaluated for the awardees ?**

Interim reports will be due periodically with final reports due at the end of 15 months.

**20. What information will be shared publicly?**

Each awardee and an overview of the project selected for grant funding will be featured on The Nature Conservancy website and in press releases. Awardees will be asked to share concepts, challenges and solutions with other awardees. Awardees will not be asked to share proprietary information.

**Contact/Help**

Please contact us with any questions by emailing [NCSAccelerator@TNC.org](mailto:NCSAccelerator@TNC.org). We have prepared this FAQ document based on the actual questions received to ensure that we can provide the same responses to everyone. Please feel free to share any questions and we will respond and update the FAQ to make sure that all aspects of the grant program description are clear.