

Financial Assistance Program Policy

Purpose: Pierce Conservation District (PCD) offers Financial Assistance (FA) programs to defray landowner costs for implementing conservation practices that support PCD's mission to improve water quality, promote sustainable agriculture, create thriving habitat, and build a just and healthy food system for all. The goal of any FA program is to help landowners practice environmental stewardship by providing incentives for the implementation of conservation practices.

Applicability: Financial Assistance programs may include cost share programs, grants, or direct-payment programs where the landowner implements a conservation practice from an approved list and PCD acts as an administrator of funds. This umbrella policy applies to any PCD FA program that does not have its own specific policy.

Approval from Board of Supervisors: Financial Assistance programs will conform to the framework and guidelines outlined below, unless granted an exemption by the Board of Supervisors (BOS). Each FA program will develop a "*List of Eligible Practices & Reimbursement Rates*" and a "*Scoring Criteria Worksheet*" to be approved by the BOS. Following approval of these program documents, individual projects may be authorized by FA program managers. FA program managers will provide a regular summary of projects implemented with the FA program to the Board of Supervisors.

Financial Assistance Program Framework:

Template Documents: These template documents are available for use by all FA programs. If PCD is not the primary administrator of the FA program, the primary administrator's documents may be substituted here. A FA program may modify, develop, or use other program specific documents in place of the "*Cooperator Agreement*" and the "*Financial Assistance Contract*" with approval from the BOS.

A. Agreements

- a. *Cooperator Agreement* – The Cooperator Agreement is submitted with the Application to establish the roles and responsibilities of the Cooperator and the Conservation District in the FA program.
- b. *Financial Assistance Contract* – Cooperators will complete a "Financial Assistance Contract" once approved for funding, which will include:
 - i. approved project plans with specifications, as appropriate,
 - ii. cooperator's operations and maintenance plan for maintaining the practice for its lifetime,
 - iii. evidence of competition in bid process or solicitation of personal services, if required,
 - iv. copies of any permits obtained for the project.

Program Specific Documents: These documents will be developed by the FA program staff.

A. Program Practices and Scoring -

- a. *List of Eligible Practices & Reimbursement Rates* – Each FA program will develop a list of Eligible Practices, with specific practice standards, and associated reimbursement rates. Rates will include percent reimbursement and maximums for each Eligible Practice. This list will be presented to the Board of Supervisors for approval. Each FA program will establish limitations to the frequency and repetition of practices, and the maximum amount of funding a property or Cooperator may receive.
- b. *Scoring Criteria Worksheet* – The worksheet is used to rank applications according to established criteria and eliminate applications that do not meet eligibility requirements. This worksheet will be presented to the Board of Supervisors for approval.

B. Project worksheets

- a. *Application* – Applications will collect comprehensive information about the applying party (Cooperator) and the property where project work is proposed. Applications will provide an overview of the FA

process. In an Application, the Cooperator or staff will identify the Eligible Practice(s) they propose to implement.

- b. *Reimbursement Form* – Following implementation of the conservation practices, the Reimbursement Form will document the project's expenses and completion, including:
 - i. a list of the Eligible Practices implemented,
 - ii. copies of project receipts.

Eligibility

1. Cooperators – All property owners within Pierce County are eligible for FA programs.
 - a. District staff and Associate Supervisor eligibility – PCD will rely on the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) [Policy 09-02 Cost Share Participation by Conservation District Municipal Officers including Employees and Associate Supervisors](#) to interpret [RCW 89.08.220\(4\)](#) and [RCW 42.23.030](#), which describe limitations on staff member and Associate Supervisor participation in FA programs. The [Policy 09-02](#) interpretation states that district staff and Associate Supervisors are eligible for FA programs, with the limitation that total financial assistance received by a staff member or Associate Supervisor cannot exceed \$1,500 in any calendar month.
 - i. Use of WSCC funds – Per WSCC [Policy 09-02](#) on use of WSCC funds, PCD will notify WSCC “each time any cost share applications involve conservation district employees or associate supervisors. The notification will include minutes from a district board meeting where the board has approved cost share participation by a district employee or Associate Supervisor after considering the ethics requirements for municipal officers set forth in [RCW 42.23.030](#) and [RCW 42.23.070](#).”
 - b. District Supervisor eligibility – District Supervisors are not subject to the provisions of [RCW 42.23.030](#) or a monthly limit.
 - c. Each FA program may establish its own more restrictive eligibility requirements for Cooperators or prioritization methods for project sites, in addition to the requirements listed here.
2. Mitigation – Mitigation practices will be considered on a case by case basis.
3. Eligible Practices – Projects must implement one or more Eligible Practices according to associated Practice standards.

Compliance

1. Project work must comply with all relevant City, County, State, and Federal laws and regulations.

Permitting

1. If permits are required for the project, the Cooperator is responsible for obtaining and/or purchasing all permits before beginning project work. PCD staff may offer Technical Assistance to assist Cooperator in acquiring permits. Permits may be a reimbursable expense.
2. Copies of project permits will be required with the “Financial Assistance Contract”.
3. Upon completion of the project, it is the responsibility of the Cooperator to submit appropriate documentation of County (or other appropriate government) approval of permitted projects. Any deviation from the permitted activity and any subsequent mitigation requirements are the sole responsibility of the Cooperator and may result in delay or denial of reimbursement.

Application Periods

1. FA programs will establish application periods for efficient evaluation of Applications.

Expiration of Funds

1. Projects must be completed, and all receipts submitted to the District within the timeframe designated in the “Financial Assistance Contract”. Timelines may be adjusted on a case by case basis.
2. If a grant is awarded and no evidence of progress has been made within 90 days, the District reserves the right to cancel a portion or the entirety of the contract or withdraw funds.

Maintenance and Operations

1. The Cooperator will be responsible for maintaining the practice for its lifespan and advising subsequent owners

of the property of the “Financial Assistance Contract” and maintenance of Eligible Practice(s). District staff may request to visit a property to inspect and document a completed project and evaluate whether it conforms to Practice standards.

Reimbursement

1. IRS Reporting – PCD will follow the WSCC “District Operations Brief” (Jan. 2017) on IRS 1099 Reporting and Forms to determine when IRS 1099 forms will be issued to Cooperators.
2. Use of Funds –
 - a. FA programs may establish a list of approved costs that is more restrictive than the following: Consumable project materials, labor (PCD will follow current WSCC labor rates), private design costs, equipment rentals, permits. Cooperators will be recommended to seek at least two bids before selecting a contractor.
 - b. For projects where the Cooperator is the project manager, costs associated with correcting or amending project work to comply with Practice standards or project plans/designs provided by the District will be the sole responsibility of the Cooperator. Costs charged by a contractor for corrections to the project due to the contractor not following the Practice standards or project plans/designs provided by the District will not be reimbursable.
 - c. Unforeseen costs that exceed the contract amount may be eligible for reimbursement increase.
3. Reimbursement Process –
 - a. Original receipts and time records must be submitted to the FA program manager within 30 days of project completion. Funds will only be reimbursed after all receipts and time records are submitted to the District. Reimbursement will be made to the Cooperator within 30 days of receiving all receipts, or within 30 days of a scheduled completion site visit. PCD may require a site visit to confirm project completion and compliance with Practice standards.
 - b. Expenses incurred prior to execution of the “Financial Assistance Contract” are not reimbursable.

Direct Payment

1. To reduce barriers to participation, PCD staff may provide project management and direct payment to a contractor or vendor for approved Practices under the FA contract. FA program managers will comply with all Financial Policies, including “District Spending Authority” and “Bid Process”, for direct payment programs. The processes outlined above for funding rates, use of funds, and reimbursement process for charges not directly funded by PCD still apply.
2. For projects where PCD staff serve as the project manager, any agreement with a contractor will specify that the contractor is responsible for costs associated with project corrections to comply with project plans, designs, and Practice standards.
3. Unforeseen costs that exceed the contract amount may be eligible for direct payment increase.

Application Approval and Ranking Process

1. FA programs will establish a Scoring Criteria Worksheet to rank Applications.
 - a. Ranking criteria will incorporate program-level prioritization tools.
 - b. FA programs will identify appropriate staff or other parties to evaluate Applications using the Scoring Criteria Worksheet.
2. Once approved for funding, Cooperators will complete a “Financial Assistance Contract”, which serves as the notice of award and authorized project plan.

End of policy