

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Application for Local Sponsor Certification

2/26/13 (Most recent revision), 1/31/13 (original posting)

***Note:** Revised or added questions will be marked with a date at the end of the answer.

General Questions

Question: Who is eligible to apply?

Answer: Cities, counties, townships, soil and water conservation districts and non-profit organizations such as land trusts are eligible to become certified local sponsors.

Question: Can landowners apply for local sponsor certification?

Answer: No. Landowners apply at a later stage after local sponsors have been selected for funding. Under the new Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program, landowners will apply to and through local sponsors as was done in the past, but this time the local sponsor rather than the state will select the farm or farms and will handle more of the negotiation process.

Question: When can local sponsors apply for certification?

Answer: The application period is February 1 through March 15, 2013.

Question: What is the purpose of applying to become a certified local sponsor?

Answer: In applying to become a certified local sponsor, an organization seeks to demonstrate that they have the capability to acquire, hold, manage and enforce agricultural easements and that they have the staff and resources to carry out the work. Additionally, local sponsors will have an advantage in being selected if they can demonstrate substantive support for farmland preservation in their communities. Due to limited funding, not all organizations applying to become certified will be. Local sponsors selected for certification will receive funds from the Ohio Department of Agriculture to manage a grant application process in their communities. Local landowners may then apply to the certified local sponsors through a competitive process to sell an agricultural easement on their land to ODA and the local sponsor.

Question: Can more than one local sponsor apply to manage an easement purchase grant process in a county?

Answer: Yes, but doing so would likely reflect a lack of coordination on the part of both organizations. It is preferable for the organizations to avoid duplication and that one organization apply with the other organization's support. An organization receiving funding may not sub-grant it to another organization to operate a separate easement application process.

Question: If my organization does not apply for Certification during this application period, will we be able to apply in the future?

Answer: Yes, there will be an Application for Local Sponsor Certification prior to each landowner funding round of the LAEPP. ***Added 2/15/13**

Application-specific Questions

Question: In completing Section B (Organization Capacity – Staff) of the Application for Local Sponsor Certification, if an organization has expertise that falls outside the questions listed, how can that information be provided?

Answer: If the information is directly applicable to staff resources, add it to the Comment section (B.3.f)

Question: In completing Section C (Organization Capacity – Budget), should budget information be provided based on the previous, current or next fiscal year?

Answer: Provide actual budget information based on the current fiscal year. Use the comments section to elaborate if necessary. *Revised 2/26/13

Question: In completing Section C (Organization Capacity – Budget), how exact should the figures be?

Answer: Budget figures should be rounded to the nearest thousand dollars.

Question: How can additional information be added for sections of the application without a Comment section?

Answer: Additional information should not be necessary, but comments regarding Sections D, E, F, G or H can be included in Section I - General Comments on the bottom of page 3 or in either of the comment sections on page 1. Be sure to reference which section letter and question number the comment refers to.

Question: Regarding Section D (Organizational Capacity –Easements) and Section G (Service Area Statistics), what do I do if the links do not work when I click on them?

Answer: In most cases, clicking on the provided link should take you to the appropriate document. If it does not, try to copy and paste the link into your browser. If that still doesn't work, contact the Office of Farmland Preservation (farmlandpres@agri.ohio.gov) so that we may provide you with the appropriate document via email.

Question: Regarding Section D (Organizational Capacity –Easements) Question 5, shall I only include easements where my organization holds the Easement alone through FRPP, or should I also include those easements where my organization is the local grantee and the Department of Agricultural was the State Grantee and Cooperating Entity with NRCS?

Answer: If your organization is named as a Grantee on a closed Federal FRPP Deed (signed by NRCS), include it as a part of Question 5. *Revised 2/26/13

Question: Regarding Section D (Organizational Capacity –Easements) Question 8, regarding the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), the link in the question takes me to the Office of Farmland Preservation Home Page, but where is the MOA on that page?

Answer: Please scroll down the main content part of the page. The Memorandum of Agreement is below the paragraphs on the Technical Committee and the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

Question: Regarding Section D (Organizational Capacity – Easements) Question 8, regarding the MOA, does it need to be signed if our organization is not participating in the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program?

Answer: No. The MOA only applies in cases where local sponsors are participating in FRPP. Please note participation in FRPP is encouraged because doing so brings additional funding for Ohio farmland preservation.

Question: Regarding Section D (Organizational Capacity – Easements) Question 8 regarding the Memorandum of Agreement, do we need to know definitively whether or not we will sign the MOA at the time the Application for Local Sponsor Certification is completed?

Answer: No. This question and the MOA are there to allow you and your attorney to read and review the document so you are aware of it and prepared to respond if your organization receives funding.

Question: Regarding Section D (Organizational Capacity – Easements) Question 9, do I list every county of my service area, even those in which I do not plan on holding an application round for landowners?

Answer: Please list all counties of your service area in Question 9. When you come to Sections F (Local Support) and G (Service Area Statistics), please focus more on the counties to which the organization intends to open their landowner application. For instance, your organization may have a service area of 10 counties (list them in Section D, Question 9), but may only be planning to focus the landowner application on 2-3 counties within that service area. *Added 2/11/13

Question: Regarding Section E (Organizational Capacity – Other) is there a list of experienced organizations which may be interested in mentoring a less experienced organization?

Answer: Please contact our office at 614-728-6210 and we will suggest organizations you may want to contact.

Question: Regarding Section E (Organizational Capacity – Other) Question 2, how can experienced organizations identify organizations that may be seeking a mentor in order to share expertise and gain points advantage in the scoring?

Answer: Please contact the Office of Farmland Preservation by phone (614-728-6210) or email (farmlandpres@agri.ohio.gov) and indicate the organization's interest in serving as a mentor so that we can share the information with those organizations looking for a mentor. Another option is to visit the Coalition of Ohio Land Trusts (COLT) website, <http://www.ohiolandtrusts.org/> and exchange information with other farmland preservation organizations.

Question: Regarding Section E (Organization Capacity-Other), Question 3, should I attach the documents listed if our organization is a Land Trust or Charitable Organization?

Answer: Yes. In order to speed up the process, please either provide us with a copy of the documents listed in Section E-3 of the Application for Local Sponsor Certification when your application is submitted on March 15, or be prepared to do so by April 5, 2013. For example, in response to Question E-3-a: submit a list of the members of your Governing Board, for E-3-d:

send minutes for the last year's annual meeting, etc. We must have this information before announcing the organizations selected for funding. *Added 2/26/13

Question: Regarding Section E (Organization Capacity-Other) Question 3c (Stewardship Fund), what information should I attach as a Land Trust or Charitable Organization?

Answer: Please provide a copy of your organization's Stewardship Policy and the amount currently available in your Stewardship Fund. *Added 2/26/13

Question: Regarding Section E (Organization Capacity-Other) Question 3d (Annual Meeting Minutes), what information should I attach Land Trust or Charitable Organization?

Answer: Please provide a copy of your organization's most recent Annual Meeting's minutes. *Added 2/26/13

Question: Regarding Sections F (Local Support) and G (Service Area Statistics), how can I add responses for more than three counties?

Answer: Those land trust planning to accept landowner applications from more than three counties for this funding round, please print additional copies of page 3 and label them 3a, 3b, etc. If the land trust represents many counties but plans to accept applications from landowners in a subset of counties, only the information for those counties is required for Sec. F & G.

Question: Regarding all the questions in Section F (Local Support), how should a township or city respond?

Answer: If the applicant for certification is a township or municipality, respond to the questions in F with information applicable to your jurisdiction. For Section G, Questions 1-4, provide county level data so that your responses can be compared at the same scale as other respondents.

Question: Regarding Section F (Local Support) Question 1, what if the county has multiple documents that show agriculture as a priority?

Answer: Include the date of the most recent adopted document for each county, and attach all relevant documentation that puts the county on record as setting aside land for agricultural production and promoting agricultural land use. Mark the document to indicate where it speaks to setting aside land for agricultural production or promotes agricultural land use. Do not send documents where this cannot be shown. *Added 2/26/13

Question: In answering Section F (Local Support) Question 2 regarding Agricultural Security Areas (ASA), if the county has more than one ASA, should the number of ASAs be listed in the space provided for each county?

Answer: Yes, that is helpful.

Question: In answering Section G (Service Area Statistics) Question 1 regarding whether or not the county has previously received AEPP funds, is the answer "Yes" if the county was awarded funds but the easement did not close?

Answer: No. Answer by circling "No" if the county has not closed an AEPP easement. The only exception is if a 2011 AEPP easement is pending and expected to close, in which case, answer "Yes".

Question: In answering Section G (Service Area Statistics) Questions 2 and 4, is there a way to electronically circle or mark the correct response?

Answer: Within Adobe Acrobat, try to circle within the PDF document by going to Tools > Comment and Markup > Oval Tool in Acrobat. If that doesn't work, you also have the option of circling the answer after the form is printed. Do NOT highlight the answer as this will come through as blacked out after being scanned. *Revised 2/6/13

Question: In answering Section H (Organizational Preference), is there a way for me to send my localized content to ODA for review prior to Certification?

Answer: Yes. You can email your substitute "Other" section, for a total of 29 points in the landowner application, to the Office of Farmland Preservation at farmlandpres@agri.ohio.gov. Staff will review your questions and point structure, to ensure it meets ORC and OAC requirements. Submitting questions for pre-approval to ODA during the local sponsor Certification application period does not guarantee Certification or funding. *Added 2/11/13

Question: On page four above the signatures it states "By signing this application below, the organization agrees that it has the necessary expertise to hold, manage, monitor and enforce agricultural easements." Does this language create new requirements for local sponsors to enforce the easements?

Answer: No. The language mimics the language in Section 5 of the state deed of easement and has been there for some time. In practicality, enforcement is a shared responsibility between ODA and the local sponsor with ODA taking the lead on any legal action that may be necessary. If it is an FRPP deed, the US Department of Agriculture, the ODA and the local sponsor would be involved.

Question: Regarding Section J (Signatures), what if the person who is completing the application is also the individual that would normally sign under "authorized by"?

Answer: The signature area was designed to accommodate a variety of organizational structures. If the person completing the application is also the authorizing signatory for the organization, have them sign in both places. *Added 2/26/13