

United States Department of Agriculture  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
National Organic Program  
Transition to Organic Partnership Program



## USDA Northeast Regional Center for Organic Transition

### Request for Proposals

#### **About Pennsylvania Certified Organic (PCO), TOPP-NE Region Lead Partner:**

PCO is a USDA-accredited organic certifying agency that educates and certifies growers, processors and handlers of organic crops, wild crops, livestock and livestock products in the contiguous United States. PCO is also proud to be an accredited certifying agent for OPT Certified Grass-Fed Organic Certification and Regenerative Organic Certification, which are separate programs that build upon the organic standards.

#### **[USDA Transition to Organic Partnerships Program](#)**

PCO holds a five-year cooperative agreement with the USDA National Organic Program to lead the Northeast Regional Center for Organic Transition (Center)- as part of the new USDA Transition to Organic Partnership Program (TOPP). PCO is seeking subcontracts with organizations and institutions to organize farmer to farmer mentorships, provide technical assistance and wrap-around support for transitioning and existing organic farmers in the following 13 states and the District of Columbia: Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware.

#### **Contract information**

- PCO will fund projects on a yearly or project-based contract written with an option to renew (mutually agreed upon). The timeline of the full cooperative agreement is from October 31, 2022 – October 30, 2027.
- PCO will fund up to \$100,000 per year.
- There is a 10% indirect cost ceiling for all proposals.
- Examples of allowable costs: Salary and Fringe, Travel, Materials and Supplies, Event Costs, Marketing Handouts
- For a detailed list of allowed/unallowed costs, please see the [AMS Grants Division Terms and Conditions 8.2, starting on page 8.](#)

- Payment is based on the submission of concrete deliverables to PCO. All payments are based on reimbursements for deliverables completed.
- Applicant must be registered with SAM.gov and provide their UEI number.
- Applicants must fill out a quarterly report on Deliverables and Activities for each quarter of the contract.

## **Eligibility Requirements**

PCO is accepting proposals from organizations and institutions (nonprofit & public) in the following 13 states and the District of Columbia: Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware.

## **Priority Areas:**

### 1) Organic Farmer-to-Farmer Mentorship

Establish and administer a farmer-to-farmer mentorship program focused on organic transition, including mentor and mentee outreach and recruitment, onboarding and training, mentor compensation, and mentor coaching and monitoring.

Outcomes: Prospective organic farmers in each state will receive mentorship from a cadre of advanced certified organic farmers. This mentorship will focus on both the regulations and production tenants of certified organic farming. Mentorship will take place in-person, on the phone, via text, and in virtual forums.

Sample Deliverables: mentor/mentee agreements, curriculum for training mentors, publicity flyer for mentor open farm field day.

### 2) Community Building

Establish opportunities for community building in each state, which will include both face-to-face networking opportunities and online networking and resource hubs, where farmers can connect with and contact each other online, and locate resources such as trainings, templates for organic system plans, organic regulations, and tips for organic farming.

Outcomes: Prospective organic farmers will participate in community building events both in person and virtually across the Northeast region. Events will be geared towards inclusivity and designed to attract and connect farmers who are interested becoming certified organic producers.

Sample Deliverables: Webinar and discussion group of Organic 101 educational session for target group of farmers, promoting the TOPP program at a conference or event while recruiting farmers to participate in the mentorship program, hosting a workshop or roundtable for transitioning or organic farmers, hosting a field walk or other event to connect farmers practicing or interested in organic.

### 3) Technical Assistance and Training

Provide on-the-ground, local technical assistance to train mentees and prospective organic farmers

through regional culturally and linguistically diverse on-farm field days and workshops. These sessions will provide region-appropriate content and engagement including education and technical assistance on agronomy, organic certification, conservation planning, business development (including navigating the supply chain), regulations, and marketing. As a key component of these trainings transitioning farmers and processors will be supported in completing their first Organic System Plans. Technical assistance will link to the USDA Organic Transition Initiatives' NRCS pillar, providing connections and information about how NRCS will support organic transition on an ongoing basis.

Outcomes: Prospective organic farmers will receive technical assistance to learn more about organic practices and certification and support their transition to organic. Technical assistance will be provided by both state agencies (ex: cooperative extension, NRCS), regional non-profits, and project partners. Technical assistance will support prospective farmers in successful transition to certified organic production.

Sample Deliverables: Organic producer IPM/Input guide for geographic region, hosting on-farm training about organic transition, extension newsletter for farmer audience with technical information about organic growing, conference session at a farmer-facing conference that includes Organic Transition training.

#### 4) Workforce Training and Development (Human Capital)

To expand organic markets and increase demand, the organic sector requires a workforce with knowledge of organic practices. Organizations will build organic focused workforce training and education and participate in future human capital planning for the organic sector. Workforce development projects will invest in partnerships that expand the agricultural supply chain workforce knowledge of organic practices and market development across the agriculture and food supply chain (organic farming and production, storage, handling, shipping, processing). Partners will integrate educational and workforce development programming with local market development and focus student learning opportunities on a range of activities including marketing, product development, organic handling, organic oversight, and organic technical consultants (such as Pest Control Advisors, Certified Crop Advisors, and Technical Service Providers).

Outcome: Partners will build and expand educational programs across the region that will focus on state specific needs for workforce development to support the organic supply chain.

Sample deliverables: Course curriculum for new or augmented class in a college or university, handbook developed for organic-handling certificate course at junior college.

#### **Proposal format (see template, below)**

- Cover Page
  - Include the name, email, phone number, address, for the principal investigator.
- Narrative (up to 5 pages)

- Introduction
- Capacity to partner
- Priority area(s) addressed (see 1-5 above)
- Activities and deliverables
- Project outcomes
- Detailed budget

## **Submission Requirements**

All proposals must be submitted electronically. Please use the proposal template included at the end of this document.

## **Selection Criteria**

Award selection will be based upon alignment with the TOPP goal areas and the reach and inclusivity of the proposed project. All proposals will be evaluated by PCO staff.

## **Reporting Requirements**

Funded projects will provide a copy of their budget in a Deliverables format. Funded projects will also provide quarterly reports and copies of deliverables that present the activities undertaken for each quarter. Funded subcontractors will participate in evaluation and story telling led with tools provided by PCO.

All chosen TOPP collaborators will also participate in data collection and reporting. Some examples of data that could be included in data collection and reporting/evaluation are the number of farmers participating in mentorship, receiving technical assistance, or participating in community building. Other examples could include: the number of transitioning farms enrolled in all programs; completed and verified OSPs; acres in transition/certified; crops/commodities focus; primary language of farmers; barriers to transitioning; successful strategies producers have adopted to overcome barriers; and percentage of farms who get certified and stay in the program each year. Quarterly reports will also include listings of services and events provided over specific time periods.

## **Recipient Requirements**

The recipient of this funding agrees to:

- Conduct data collection and provide a report to the TOPP-NE lead partner, PCO, from all TOPP related activities, following TOPP-program approved data collection protocols and metrics;
- Share official TOPP program information, utilizing the resources provided by the TOPP-NE lead partner;

- Share information about organic farming and ensure all NOP (National Organic Program) related information is accurate and follows the NOP guidelines;
- Remain Organic System Plan (OSP) neutral: may not promote one certifying agency over another

### **Contact Information**

For questions about this RFP, please contact Diana Kobus or Leilani Durand at [topp-ne@paorganic.org](mailto:topp-ne@paorganic.org).

**Proposal template.** Use of this form is optional, but all proposals must follow the given format.

**NORTHEAST REGION TOPP PARTNER PROPOSAL**

<b>Proposal Title:</b>
<b>Principal Investigator name and contact information:</b>
<b>Total Funding Request:</b>

<b>TOPP PRIORITIES ADDRESSED (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)</b>	
<b>Organic Farmer-to-Farmer Mentorship</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Community Building</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Technical Assistance and Training</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Workforce Training and Development (Human Capital)</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**1- Proposal Summary (200 words maximum)**

**2- Proposal Narrative (up to 5 pages)**

**NARRATIVE GUIDELINES:**

The project narrative should be no more than 5 pages single spaced, 12 point Calibri font, with 1" page margins.

**1. Introduction, including background on your organization and its capacity to partner**

**2. TOPP priority areas addressed**

Describe the TOPP priority areas, as described in this RFP, that your project will address.

**3. Specific activities**

Briefly describe the activities that will be undertaken for each TOPP goal area and the timeframe when they will occur. If funding is requested for events, list the date or dates the event will occur.

**4. Specific project deliverables**

Briefly describe the specific deliverables that will be produced by the project activities by TOPP goal area with the timeline of when deliverables will be completed.

**5. Specific Outcomes**

**6. Project Scope**

Describe how this project builds on or supports any of your organization’s ongoing projects or activities and contributes to the overall goals of the TOPP program.

**3- Detailed budget**

Budget must include a detailed breakout of all costs, including personnel, travel, event hosting costs, supplies, and any indirect costs (10% maximum). The budget must show the total cost for the project and describe how category costs listed in the budget are derived. The budget must show a relationship between work planned and performed to the costs incurred.

Budget Summary

<b>Expense category</b>	<b>TOPP funds</b>
<b>Personnel</b>	
<b>Fringe benefits</b>	
<b>Travel</b>	
<b>Supplies</b>	
<b>Other (specify)</b>	
<b>Direct costs subtotal</b>	
<b>Indirect costs (capped at 10%)</b>	
<b>Total budget (direct + indirect)</b>	

## Personnel

List each person who has a substantive role in the project and the amount of the request. Personnel costs should be reasonable for the services rendered, and conform to the established written policy of your organization.

#	Name/title and justification for requesting funds	Level of effort (# of hours OR % FTE)	Salary or stipend requested	Total funds requested
1				\$
2				\$
3				\$
4				\$
<b>Personnel subtotals</b>				<b>\$</b>

## Fringe Benefits

Provide the fringe benefit rates for each of the project's salaried employees listed above. The costs of fringe benefits should be reasonable and in line with established policies of your organization.

#	Name/title	Fringe benefit rate	Funds requested
1			\$
2			\$
3			\$
<b>Fringe benefits subtotals</b>			<b>\$</b>

## Travel

Explain the purpose for each Trip Request.

Trip #	Trip destination, timing, and justification for requesting funds	Type of expense (airfare, car rental, hotel, mileage)	Unit of measure (days, nights, miles)	# of units	Cost per unit	Funds requested
1						\$
2						\$



Trip #	Trip destination, timing, and justification for requesting funds	Type of expense (airfare, car rental, hotel, mileage)	Unit of measure (days, nights, miles)	# of units	Cost per unit	Funds requested
3						\$
<b>Travel subtotal</b>						<b>\$</b>

### Supplies

List the materials and supplies needed and describe how they will support the purpose and goal of the proposal.

Item description and justification for requesting funds	Cost Per-unit	# of units/pieces purchased	Acquire when?	Funds requested
	\$			\$
	\$			\$
<b>Supplies subtotal</b>				<b>\$</b>

### Events

Include all event costs as a single line item, including event space rental, table and chair rental, food and drink, A/V rental and other costs related to hosting or participating in an event. Include any marketing materials, handouts, etc. under supplies costs.

Event description, timing, and estimated number of attendees	Event cost	Funds Requested
		\$
<b>Subtotal event costs</b>		<b>\$</b>

### Other

Include any expenses not covered in any of the previous budget categories. Be sure to break down costs into cost/unit. Expenses in this section include, but are not limited to, meeting and conference space rental, communications, publication costs, and data collection.

Item Description and Justification for Requesting Funds	Per-Unit Cost	# of Units/Pieces	Acquire When?	Funds Requested
				\$
				\$
<b>Other subtotal</b>				

**Expenses broken out by deliverable and date:**

Funds are paid quarterly after completion of deliverables. Funded projects must provide a copy of their budget in a Deliverables format. The Deliverables budget must be tracked in an Excel *Deliverable\_Activities\_Timeline\_Budget* spreadsheet that will be provided upon proposal award.