

National Bulletin: 440-24-08

Date: 11/02/2023

Subject: PGM - Closeout of Partnership Agreements under
the 2014 Farm Bill Regional Conservation
Partnership Program and Post Project Funds
Management

Purpose: This national bulletin provides interim guidance to states on how to close 2014 Farm Bill Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP14) partnership agreements.

Expiration Date: September 30, 2024.

Background: This national bulletin summarizes the programmatic and financial requirements for closeout of partnership agreements and management of open obligations associated with covered programs for projects executed under RCPP14. See attachment A, “2014 FB Status Report from Portal.” Permanent policy will be released at a future date.

Explanation: Following completion of each RCPP14 partnership agreement (including expiration, partner initiated early completion, or NRCS termination), partners and lead states have agreement closeout responsibilities; additionally, NRCS may have residual responsibilities associated with covered program awards (e.g., RCPP-EQIP).

Closeout procedures must follow relevant RCPP and FPAC Business Center Grants and Agreements Division (GAD) policy. Use the attached GAD closeout checklist (attachment B) and RCPP closeout checklist (attachment C) to ensure all closeout steps are followed.

Partner Responsibilities:

For projects governed by cooperative agreements, lead partners must submit:

- Final RCPP project report
- Final SF-270, “Request for Advance or Reimbursement” (if applicable)
- Final SF-425, “Federal Financial Report”

Partnership agreement terms allow up to 90 days for lead partners to submit these documents. For FY 2018 projects only, the documents must be submitted through ezFedGrants.

For projects created through a memorandum of understanding (MOU), the lead partner must complete reporting requirements as specified in the MOU.

Lead State Responsibilities:

For both cooperative agreements and MOU-based projects, lead states must ensure that partners meet responsibilities as outlined in their agreement. Lead states must also complete the closeout and funds management steps outlined below.

Required Actions:

Lead states must ensure that the closeout is fully recorded in Portal and submit a closeout request to GAD through the ServiceNow portal (follow GAD procedures to submit the request). GAD will process the closeout, including (for cooperative agreements only) the de-obligation of any remaining funds for the partnership agreement. GAD sends a letter to the partner indicating that the agreement is closed.

Lead states and, if applicable, each partner state must evaluate the remaining funds in project work breakdown structure (WBS) codes, including de-obligated technical assistance (TA) funds, and determine how much financial assistance (FA) and TA is needed to carry out post-expiration or -termination RCPP contract activities. States must follow the guidance below:

- No new covered program contracts may be executed to support expired RCPP project agreements. States may keep up to either 5 percent of the obligated project FA or \$10,000 for cost overruns, whichever is more, for legitimate project purposes (e.g., producer's contract modifications, easement due diligence, associated with previously executed and still active FA contracts) that support active producer contracts or easements pending closure.
- NRCS may only keep the amount of project TA necessary to support ongoing activities (e.g., check-outs of installed EQIP or CSP activities associated with active FA contracts executed during project term). Any TA beyond that must be returned to national headquarters.
 - Do not take funding for long-term stewardship and monitoring of easements closed under since-expired projects into consideration. Funding for these activities will be allocated through a separate process.
- Retained TA should mainly be used to pay NRCS staff in fulfilling NRCS TA responsibilities. NRCS-use TA funds may be obligated to qualified technical service providers or for other purposes through any legitimate federal procurement or award processes necessary to fulfill NRCS TA responsibilities.

If lead or partner states determine there are excess funds in any project WBS, the allowance holder state must request a funds assessment through the Financial Assistance Programs Division SharePoint. Funds assessment requests must include the WBS code and amount to be returned. Projects Branch staff will coordinate the sweep of returned funds.

The lead state coordinates the determination of excess funds in both lead and partner states, as applicable.

Contact: Please direct questions about this bulletin to Maria M. Collazo at maria.collazo@usda.gov or the RCPP inbox at RCPP@usda.gov.

Attachments: Attachment A – 2014 FB Project Status Report
Attachment B – Grants and Agreements Closeout Certification
Attachment C – RCPP Closeout Checklist