



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Division of International Conservation Combating Wildlife Trafficking Program

Species Conservation Catalyst Fund (SCCF)

<https://www.fws.gov/service/species-conservation-catalyst-fund>

Fiscal Year: 2024

F24AS00017

Due Date for Applications: 12/08/2023

Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated 10/20/2023

Please find below a list of questions that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has been asked by potential applicants regarding the first **Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)** for the Combating Wildlife Trafficking Program - **Species Conservation Catalyst Fund (SCCF)**. The NOFO can be found [here](#) and contains detailed information on proposal requirements. To submit a proposal, use [GrantSolutions.gov](https://www.grantsolutions.gov) (preferred portal; search for funding opportunity F24AS00017) or [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov). For any questions, please email cwt@fws.gov and cc Jen Miller, Songbird Program Officer, at Jennifer_R_Miller@fws.gov.

Question: Where can applicants find required forms and instructions to complete forms?

Answer: The Standard Form (SF) 424, 424A, and associated instructions are located here: <https://www.grants.gov/forms/sf-424-family.html>. Please see [here](#) for additional instructions for completing the SF-424A.

Question: Will projects in Cuba or Venezuela be funded?

Updated answer: This program will not fund projects in countries that have supported terrorism (including Cuba). Work in Venezuela is subject to U.S. sanctions for some prohibited entities (listed on the [Specially Designated Nationals And Blocked Persons List](#)) and activities (see [Executive Orders and other sanction information](#)). Projects in Venezuela are eligible to be funded if project entities (the organizations and people leading or involved in the work) and activities are not prohibited. For additional information and hyperlinks, see section C3. Other in the NOFO or reach out to Jen Miller, Songbird Program Officer, at Jennifer_R_Miller@fws.gov.



Question: Are the sections listed under the Project Narrative relevant for applicants applying for Objective 2, and if so, how?

Answer: Yes, the sections listed under the Project Narrative are generally relevant for applicants applying for Objective 2, although we acknowledge these are tailored more to Objective 1. Here are some considerations for applicants applying under Objective 2:

- Applicants should refer to the description for Objective 2 (pg. 6 of the NOFO) to frame the conservation problem in the Statement of Need and integrate any available evidence on collaborative conservation, partnership-building, etc. For example, without collaboration and/or coordination, conservation partners may not realize the power of their collective efforts across the full trade chain to achieve effective, sustainable reductions in the illegal, unsustainable trade of songbirds for singing competitions.
- Applicants should develop a Monitoring and Evaluation table (pg. 11 of the NOFO Supplemental Document) to the best of their ability, acknowledging that it may be slightly different than standard project-based Monitoring and Evaluation tables. For example, indicators could focus on the direct impacts of strengthening the conservation partners' abilities to effectively implement projects, and hence indirectly advance outcomes for songbird trade. Applicants should look to Outcomes 2.1-2.3 (pg. 11 of the NOFO Supplemental Document) for ideas for the desired Outcomes to include in the Monitoring and Evaluation table and may additionally draft new Outcomes based on specific proposed activities.
- Government letters of endorsement may not be relevant for applicants applying to Objective 2; however, partner organization letters of endorsement will always strengthen a proposal as noted in the Criteria section (pg. 25 of the NOFO).
- We acknowledge that applicants under Objective 2 may not know which entities are applying to Objective 1 of the NOFO. Once awards are issued, the Service will work closely with the award recipient for Objective 2 to finalize activities and budget based on the needs of the recipients of Objective 1 awards. The award for Objective 2 is indeed as a cooperative agreement, which will involve close collaboration between the Service and the award recipient to design and strategize implementation.
- Organizations do not need to be working on songbirds to be eligible but should be familiar with the general threats to songbirds and relevant parties involved.
- All proposals for Objectives 1-2 will be assessed using the same criteria listed on pgs. 25-26 of the NOFO; please refer to the Criteria section when developing your proposal.
- The budget table on pgs. 16-17 of the NOFO is an example; applicants should adapt as they see fit. For example, some of the budget items listed in the example table may not be relevant for applicants under Objective 2. In addition, the Service will work with the selected partner under Objective 2 to potentially adapt the budget once proposals have been reviewed, in order to tailor the budget to the awarded projects under Objective 1. As noted on pg. 6 of the NOFO, applicants under Objective 2 should initially plan and budget activities to include several key personnel from each award recipient, with likely two to six awards lasting between two and five years, and recipients likely based in the regions where



songbird trade is occurring (e.g., South America, the Caribbean, North America and Europe).

Question: Will we be disqualified if we unintentionally forget a form when we submit our application?

Answer: No, you will not be immediately disqualified if you don't submit all the required forms when you submit your application. Once all proposals are received, we will conduct a preliminary administrative review and reach out to applicants who are missing any required materials. All applicants are given a standard deadline (e.g., 5 days) to submit the missing documents. Any applicants who do not submit the missing documents by the deadline may then be disqualified from the review process and will not advance to merit review.

Question: Are organizations able to submit proposals through Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit Networks (CESUs)?

Answer: Yes, we can receive CESU applications via the application procedures noted on page 24 of the NOFO. No special form is needed, but it would be helpful if CESU applicants could mention submitting via the CESU in the project narrative. Please note the CESU indirect cost language on page 23 of the NOFO. In addition, CESU applications must be for cooperative agreements where the Service will have substantial involvement. Please see pages 10-11 of the NOFO for more information about cooperative agreements.

Question: Will the NOFO be translated into any other languages besides English?

Answer: At this time, the NOFO is available in English only. We are exploring future opportunities to translate NOFOs and associated materials into other languages.

Question: Are projects in French Guiana and the rest of the Caribbean eligible?

Answer: Projects in any source, transit or demand country are eligible, including French Guiana and the rest of the Caribbean if there is songbird trade linked to singing competitions. We didn't explicitly mention these countries in the NOFO because the Services isn't aware of any evidence of songbird trade for singing competitions (yet), but the NOFO is purposefully written inclusively in case project activities in these or other countries would contribute to the goals of the NOFO.

Question: Where can I find more literature about the human and other dimensions of songbird competitions and trade?



Answer: Page 8 of the NOFO contains a list of literature cited, including a 2021 article by Mirin and Klinck. This article may be helpful in providing some initial interdisciplinary literature in *English* for consideration. It is relevant to note that the authors recommend a consideration of languages other than English in future reviews on bird trade and singing contests. As stated in the NOFO, all proposal activities (including research activities) should achieve one or more of the desired NOFO outcomes. Within this context, we encourage applicants to follow best practices of inclusive science and conservation, which includes considering how to include regionally based languages such as Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch in proposal activities.

Question: When can I submit my proposal?

Answer: Applications must be submitted *between* August 2nd, 2023 and December 8th, 2023 (11:59 PM EDT).

Question: Is it possible to extend the NOFO application deadline to have more time to work on proposals?

Answer: Unfortunately, we are not able to extend the deadline given internal deadlines to spend these funds by the end of our Fiscal Year. However, there will be a revision process with applicants in 2024, and we encourage applicants to utilize this time for further strategy development during the project period to refine any project activities. For example, if some part of the project is sequential (e.g., part A is necessary to inform how part B is implemented), the proposal should describe this and justify the possible routes forward. In addition, the proposal can explain potential challenges and how the project might need to adapt in response.

Question: How many projects will be funded and how much will each grantee receive?

Answer: We anticipate funding between 3-7 proposals, but this depends on the applications and how many are recommended by the review panel for funding. A total of \$1.4 million is available to be invested through this NOFO and the expected funding per award will range from \$100,000 - \$1,000,000.

Question: Will future funding be available to address songbirds trafficking and trade?

Answer: Yes. Approximately \$4-5 million in total is expected to be available for the SCCF Songbird initiative and additional proposals will be invited through multiple funding opportunities over the next few years.



Question: What is the standard period of performance for projects? What will funding be awarded?

Answer: The standard period of performance for projects is two to five years. We expect that the funding will be awarded on June 5, 2024.

Question: Which songbird species are prioritized? Can projects focus on parrots or other birds?

Answer: Project activities should benefit one or more of the following 15 species of songbirds (suborder Passeri or Oscines, order Passeriformes). These species were selected because they are either 1) commonly traded for singing competitions and show evidence of species of population declines due to trade or 2) are threatened birds at risk of becoming a substitute species. See Appendix I. SCCF Songbird Priority Species in the NOFO Supplemental Document for more species information.

The 15 SCCF Songbird Priority Species are:

- Chestnut-bellied seedeater (*Sporophila castaneiventris*)
- Chestnut-bellied seed-finch (*Sporophila angolensis*)
- Cuban bullfinch (*Melopyrrha nigra*)
- Great-billed seed-finch (*Sporophila maximiliani*)
- Grey seedeater (*Sporophila intermedia*)
- Large-billed seed-finch (*Sporophila crassirostris*)
- Lined seedeater (*Sporophila lineola*)
- Painted bunting (*Passerina ciris*)
- Plumbeous seedeater (*Sporophila plumbea*)
- Red siskin (*Spinus cucullatus*)
- Rose-breasted grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*)
- Ruddy-breasted seedeater (*Sporophila minuta*)
- Slate-colored seedeater (*Sporophila schistacea*)
- Wing-barred seedeater (*Sporophila americana*)
- Yellow-bellied seedeater (*Sporophila nigricollis*)

Question: Can projects also benefit other trafficked animal and plant species?

Answer: Projects may also benefit other trafficked animal and plant species if activities are clearly linked to reducing the illegal, unsustainable international trade of the SCCF Songbird Priority Species for singing competitions. Songbirds were selected as an SCCF species group partly because these species share similar trade pressures as other trafficked wildlife species. Our hope is that species beyond the SCCF Songbird Priority Species will benefit from the conservation interventions necessary to reduce the illegal, unsustainable trade of songbirds, resulting in force-multiplying impacts.



Question: Can projects focus on other types of trade related to the Priority Songbird Species?

Answer: Projects must ultimately aim to impact the international songbird trade for singing competitions (i.e., not focus on trade in songbirds for the caged bird trade generally). When appropriate, activities may also help combat the illegal, unsustainable trade of birds or wildlife more broadly, but projects must primarily benefit the trade of songbirds for singing competitions.

Question: What are the priority geographic areas?

Answer: Project activities should take place in areas where priority songbird species are traded for singing competitions:

- Guiana Shield and Caribbean range countries for priority songbird species, including Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Brazil, and/or
- Transit or consumer demand countries where priority songbird species are being traded for singing competitions, including Guyana, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Brazil, the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands.

Question: Will the Service fund projects focused on domestic trade or just international trade?

Answer: The goal of the SCCF Songbird initiative is to reduce the illegal, unsustainable international trade of songbirds for singing competitions. However, we recognize that domestic and international trade can be closely linked. In some cases, changes to elements of domestic trade may be necessary to affect international trade. For these reasons, projects may focus on the domestic trade (i.e., birds sourced from the wild and sold to an end-user in the same country) if activities are clearly linked to reducing the illegal, unsustainable international trade (i.e., birds are sourced from the wild in a different country than where they are sold to an end-user).

Question: Are there any important factors for us to consider when developing our project activities?

Answer: Yes, there are a few factors to consider. For more details, please see page 8 of the NOFO. Briefly, we ask that proposals consider:

- Project activities should be developed and implemented in coordination, collaboration and/or consultation with relevant authorities and community members who will be affected by or engaged in activities (e.g., communities living in or near songbird habitat; bird dealers and transporters; bird keepers or singing competition bird clubs).
- Empirical research should be clearly tied to interventions.



- Activities should also enable trade that follows best practices for bird health care and welfare.
- All approaches and interventions should be culturally appropriate and ethical.
- best practices of inclusive science and conservation are followed, such as by conducting project activities in local language(s), prioritizing values of the local region, and centering local people and practitioners in leadership, planning and implementation (e.g., Soares et al. 2023).

Question: Can projects focus on either Objective 1 *or* Objective 2 in the NOFO?

Answer: Yes. Recognizing the time, focus, and neutrality involved in coordinating, we will give priority to projects that focus exclusively on Objective 1 (addressing the illegal, unsustainable trade of songbirds) or Objective 2 (convening and coordinating SCCF Songbird award recipients). Please see pages 4-7 in the NOFO for details.

Question: What counts as a ‘community’ for projects?

Answer: Project activities should be developed and implemented in coordination, collaboration and/or consultation with local, national and international authorities and members of communities who will be affected by or engaged in activities (e.g., communities living in or near songbird habitat; bird dealers and transporters; bird keepers or singing competition bird clubs). All approaches and interventions should be culturally appropriate and ethical.

Question: Can building a collaborative consortium of key stakeholders (i.e. an organizing body that lives beyond the project lifespan) be an explicit objective/funded activity for a project?

Answer: Yes, a project objective of this nature is welcomed. As described the Program Description of the NOFO, the Species Conservation Catalyst Fund (SCCF) seeks to support project partners to “sustain conservation impact” and provide opportunities for partners to “develop networks of researchers and practitioners.”

Question: How will funds be disbursed (e.g., in one lump sum or incrementally per year)?

Answer: This depends on how many proposals are recommended for award. Our preference is to disburse funds up front with access to specific lines of funding for the corresponding year. The Service may also fund the awards incrementally (e.g., disburse funds on an annual basis), depending on available funding.



Question: How do I complete the SF-424 and SF-424A form?

Answer: Please reach out to us at cwt@fws.gov if you have any questions about completing the SF-424 and SF-424A. We realize these forms are complex and are available to help answer any questions.

Question: Can the same person be represented on multiple proposals (e.g., in a coordination role)?

Answer: Yes, and we encourage organizations to coordinate, collaborate, and partner on activities to prevent duplication of efforts. However, please make it clear in the proposal the specific role that this person will be playing for each proposal. If, for example, an applicant was asking for full/majority time on multiple proposals, then the Service will want to understand how the individual is budgeting and managing their time.

Question: Can collaborating organizations submit distinct (individual) but complementary proposals that have overlap in personnel?

Answer: Yes, but applicants need to ensure there are no duplication of efforts across the proposals. Keep in mind that highly coordinated/integrated proposals should be able to relay their ability to operate independently from one another (e.g., if one of the coordinated proposals receives funding and the other(s) do not). Please note that there is a required overlap/duplication statement (pg. 19 of the NOFO) that says, “Applicants must provide a statement indicating if there is any overlap between this Federal application and any other Federal application, or funded project, in regard to activities, costs, or time commitment of key personnel.”

Question: Can a foreign government be an eligible applicant or partner?

Answer: Foreign governments are eligible and we encourage applications from governments. There may be additional time needed during the review process to ensure we can support the specific foreign government directly. A government can also be listed on an application as a partner, and we will need a letter of support from them (as we do with all projects). If there is an individual listed from the government who will be implementing a project as a member of a larger team (e.g., part of the key personnel), we recommend that the government endorsement/support letter come from an entity other than the same government agency.

Question: If studentships and/or scholarships cost a significant portion of the budget, will that impact the proposal’s likelihood for success?

Answer: Studentships and/or scholarships can be a meaningful form of capacity building. However, they need to be justified as the best approach for the proposed project context. If they



are, the Service would be preferential towards the funding going to in-country institutions, unless there is a strong justification for why an out-of-country institution is the better/only option. This is line with the criteria on pg. 26 of the NOFO that “Project proposals that receive higher scores in the merit reviews will: ... develop and foster lasting in-country capacity”.

Question: Are there restrictions for funding training of police or military?

Answer: We support training for rangers, police, and/or military in many cases, as needed and relevant for the proposed activities. Per the NOFO, the Service will not fund:

- the purchase of firearms or ammunition;
- gathering information by persons who conceal their true identity;
- buying or purchasing of intelligence, evidence or information or paying informants;
- law enforcement operations that, to arrest suspects, prompt them to carry out illegal activities (entrapment); and
- any activity that would circumvent sanctions, laws, or regulations of either the U.S. or the country of the proposed activity.