



STEWARDSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SAP) GUIDELINES

Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) is a nonprofit land trust created in 1980 by a coalition of conservationists and environmentalists to permanently protect Marin County farmland. Some of the Bay Area's most highly acclaimed dairy and cheese products, grass-fed meats and organic crops are produced on farmland protected by MALT's 93 conservation easements. These conservation easements have permanently protected over 55,000 acres of West Marin's diverse mosaic of coastal grasslands, oak woodlands, rangelands, and pastoral open space.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

MALT's mission is to permanently protect Marin's agricultural land for agricultural use. The Stewardship Assistance Program (SAP) provides grants to farmers and ranchers to plan, design and implement conservation practices that increase agricultural productivity, improve soil and water quality and build ecological health in concert with a partner organization, the Marin Resource Conservation District (MRCDD). Agriculture offers many benefits to the greater community, including local jobs and capital, as well as locally produced food, fiber, and other agricultural products. Protection of agriculturally productive land also helps to maintain open space, scenic views, and greenbelts. Responsibly managed agricultural lands protect aquatic ecosystems and groundwater basins, sequester carbon and provide habitat for native plants and wildlife. SAP projects contribute to these numerous public benefits through the support of ecologically beneficial and sustainable agriculture.

MALT SAP ELIGIBILITY

SAP grant applicants must meet ALL of the following eligibility requirements:

1. The proposed project will advance MALT's mission, protect conservation values of the land and provide public benefit.
2. The owner of the land has signed the SAP application.
3. The project is on land that is permanently protected with a MALT easement in good standing, and is being actively farmed or ranched to produce food or fiber for the greater community.
4. SAP funding is available to new projects that have not been started prior to execution of the grant agreement.
5. Agricultural producers may apply for one SAP grant per fiscal year; provided however, MALT will consider multiple applications for the same property submitted by different agricultural operators on the land (i.e. a landowner and lessee). If an applicant applies and is awarded a "Track 2" grant a different applicant is still eligible for a "Track 1" application within the same fiscal year.
6. No project may receive more than \$50,000 total – regardless of the number of years for project completion.

7. Applications identified as “Interested Parties”, as defined in MALT’s Conflict of Interest Policy, agree to MRCD’s policies and to have MRCD approve and administer any SAP applications.
8. Successful SAP grant applicants must allow MALT and MRCD to photograph any completed projects, develop narratives around the SAP project with landowner permission, and permit MALT and MRCD to use such photographs and project narratives for fundraising and publicity purposes if the landowner grants permission. MALT will always seek permission before using any content, photographs or narratives, in any public relations or media work.
9. Due to high demand and very limited funding pool, MALT asks that any applicant who can otherwise readily afford their selected project consider other grant programs for project funding.

BUDGET AND PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Each fiscal year MALT allocates funding to increase the stewardship of MALT-protected lands in partnership with the MRCD. These funds are procured through generous donations and used to help offset landowner cost share on conservation practices. SAP is administered through a three-track system: 1) MALT-Administered Projects; 2) Multi-Agency/Matching Commitment Projects; and 3) Interested Party Grants. Upon MALT’s review of each application, one of the aforementioned tracks will be selected.

SAP funding may reimburse up to 85% of the landowner’s cost share, with a cap of \$20,000 for Track 1 projects and a cap of \$50,000 for Track 2 projects. Track 3 projects may have either funding cap depending on the criteria of the project. Throughout the fiscal year, MALT directly reimburses landowners for Track 1 & 2 projects and will distribute funds on a project-by-project basis to the MRCD to provide funding for Track 3 projects.

TRACK 1: MALT-ADMINISTERED PROJECTS

Track 1 projects support landowners and lessees with existing MALT easements. The projects can include the planning, design and implementation of conservation practices that increase ecological or agricultural resilience. These projects often do not trigger permitting requirements or other environmental compliance issues and usually only take a few months to complete, from approval to grant payment. A few examples are repairing spring developments, installing water troughs, riparian fencing, invasive species management or soil amendments. These projects are approved through the SAP Review Committee and administered by MALT staff.

Funding Available.

MALT will fund up to 85% of the total project cost with a \$20,000 funding cap. Payment will be processed upon project completion and made through a reimbursement with a MALT issued check. The applicant must submit an estimated project cost with a quote or bid for the proposed project work.

Selection Process for MALT SAP projects

1. MALT staff will evaluate application eligibility within ten days of receipt.
2. MALT staff will evaluate the project and score it based on the selection criteria, as seen in Attachment B.

3. MALT SAP Review Committee will review applications for projects within four weeks of the application being submitted. The SAP Review Committee will consist of the Director of Stewardship, Director of Operations, Associate Director of Stewardship, and the Stewardship Program Manager.
 - a. The Review Committee will review each proposed project to determine if the project would trigger any environmental review or permits. The Review Committee may consult with MRCD staff or outside consultants if necessary. After approval by the Review Committee, any project that will require environmental permits will be directed to MRCD for consideration.
 - b. Projects will be evaluated and selected on a strategic basis based on the project's score; provided however, that all projects must meet the Minimum Score of 16.
4. MALT staff may need to visit, assess and document the project site as part of any project consideration, and the landowner will provide access to MALT staff during the project period with appropriate and responsible coordination.
5. MALT staff will inform applicants of project approval status within thirty days of receipt of the application.

Administration of MALT SAP Projects

1. Upon approval of a SAP grant application, MALT will enter into a Project Grant Agreement with the applicant (and landowner, if different).
2. The Project Grant Agreement will include a detailed project scope, project description, the agricultural and environmental benefits, and the estimated grant amount.
3. Upon successful completion of the project, as determined by a site visit by MALT staff, MALT will reimburse the applicant for the project's costs based on the receipts they receive, not to exceed the funding cap set forth in the Project Grant Agreement. All projects must be completed within one year of the date of the execution of the Project Grant Agreement, unless otherwise noted in the executed agreement.
4. Monitoring of completed SAP projects may be included in annual MALT easement monitoring visits. If there are questions or concerns about the project site, MALT may request access to visit the site outside of the scheduled annual monitoring visits.

TRACK 2: MULTI-AGENCY / MATCHING COMMITMENT PROJECTS

MALT often provides a portion of the landowner cost-share for grants awarded by other agencies, including but not limited to, the MRCD, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and the California State Coastal Conservancy. These are often complex, larger innovative projects with many partners designed to address large natural resource concerns (i.e. methane digester, stream restoration), which may also involve environmental reviews and permitting. Accordingly, these projects often take over a year to complete, from approval to grant payment. MALT commits SAP grant funding and staff time as matching commitment for grants submitted by MRCD and other agencies.

Funding Available.

MALT may fund up to 85% of the landowner cost share for Agency-led projects with a maximum funding allocation of \$50,000. Applicants will work directly with the lead Agency on planning, designing, and budgeting the project. If an applicant is enrolled in a NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) project, the applicant is eligible for up to \$50,000 for the entirety of the

contract, no matter the length (1 year, 3 years or more). If the applicant is enrolled in another program and there are several projects nested within one contract, MALT reserves the right to determine which projects the SAP grant will be applied to. For large-scale projects, MALT has reserved the right to limit the SAP contribution to climate beneficial practices that directly impact soil and water quality.

Selection Process for Multi-Agency / Matching Commitment Projects

1. MALT staff will evaluate all applications and requests within thirty days of receipt.
2. MALT SAP Review Committee will review applications for projects; all projects must meet the Minimum Score of 16.
3. In the case of project applications, MALT staff may need to visit the project site as part of any project consideration, and the landowner will provide access to MALT staff during the project period.
4. MALT staff will inform applicants of all funding decisions within sixty days of receipt of the application and will work with the Agency submitting a grant to meet the grant proposal deadlines.
5. Upon approval of a SAP grant application, MALT will enter into a Project Grant Agreement with the applicant (and landowner, if different), unless agency landowner agreements meet the conditions found in MALT's grant agreement.
6. Upon completion, MALT will rely on the lead partner agency to verify and certify completion of project(s) and/or contract. Once project/contract is certified and partner agency has contributed funding, MALT SAP funds may be applied to remainder of landowner cost share with a mandatory minimum of 15% landowner contribution towards the project contract.

Administration of Multi-Agency/Matching Commitment Project

Multi-Agency/Matching Commitment projects will be managed and administered by the lead Agency that awarded the grant.

TRACK 3: INTERESTED PARTY GRANTS

MALT board members or other “interested parties,” as defined in MALT's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#), may apply for SAP grants. MALT encourages all landowners to be good land stewards and values equity and fairness in the distribution of SAP funding. MALT also understands that MALT interested parties may be perceived as having an unfair advantage in accessing funding. Under these circumstances, MALT will engage with MRCD, a public agency that is required to be transparent to the public by holding public meetings and disclosing certain project information. The following steps will be taken for the selection of Interested Party Grants:

Selection Process for Interested Party Projects

1. MALT staff will evaluate all applications and requests within thirty days of receipt.
2. MALT SAP Review Committee will immediately forward any application that falls under the MALT Conflict of Interest Policy to MRCD for consideration.
3. MRCD will have the authority to administer the Project Grant.
4. MRCD will evaluate eligibility within thirty days of receipt from MALT.
5. MRCD staff has the authority to approve Interested Party Project Grants on a first come, first serve basis; provided that the project has a Minimum Score, as defined in the 2023-24 SAP Guidelines.

6. MRCD staff may need to visit the project site to gather information such as photos and better understand how the project will impact the greater operation.
7. MRCD staff will conduct the review process, which includes presentation to the MRCD Board at monthly meetings. MRCD Board meetings occur on the second Wednesday of each month.
 1. In order to gather materials, Staff will visit the project site and determine eligibility before the meeting. Applications received between the 1st and the 15th of the month will be presented in the following monthly meeting. Applications received in the second half of the month will be presented the following month (i.e., an application received September 23 will be presented at the November board meeting).
 2. MRCD Board presentation timing is subject to other agenda items, cancellations, and other unforeseen circumstances that may affect this timeline. MRCD Staff will notify applicants of the scheduled board meeting presentation within thirty days of application receipt.
 3. If any voting MRCD Board Director presents a real or apparent conflict of interest in connection to the applicant, the board director shall recuse themselves from deliberation and voting.
8. MRCD Staff will inform applicants of project approval or status within 72 hours of MRCD Board meeting. Upon approval of a SAP application, MRCD will enter into a Landowner Agreement.
9. MRCD staff are available for technical assistance and project management support during the construction phase.
10. Upon project completion MRCD Staff will conduct a post construction visit, complete a comprehensive Summary Sheet, and create a final invoice to share with MALT.

RESERVED RIGHTS

1. MALT reserves the right to request clarification and/or supplemental information from any applicant to facilitate evaluation of the proposed project.
2. MALT reserves the right to reject any or all applications for any reason, award funding in different amounts to varying applicants, to financially support only climate beneficial practices that have a direct impact on soil and water quality, to award funding for multiple projects to the same applicant, and the right to request an applicant re-apply to remedy errors in submission.
3. MALT shall not be held liable for any expenses incurred by SAP applicants before the date of the Grant Agreement.
4. MALT reserves the right to modify these guidelines, the attached exhibits, and any of the SAP procedures with proper notice to relevant parties.
5. MALT reserves the right to terminate the SAP program at any time and shall not be held liable for any projects without an executed grant agreement at the time of termination.

ATTACHMENTS

- Att. A: MALT SAP Example Project List
- Att. B: SAP Selection Criteria

Attachment A: MALT SAP Example Project List

SAP Category	Conservation Practice
Water Development	Spring development
	Water Tank
	Water Trough
	Water Pipe
	Water Pump
Fencing	Cross/interior
	Riparian
	Exclusionary (spring, structure, etc.)
Landscape Restoration	Streambank Repairs
	Creek Crossing Repairs
	Pasture Headcuts (ft)
	Riparian Planting
	Hedgerow/ Windbreak Planting
	Compost Application (ac)
Infrastructure Improvements	Spillway/Dam Repairs
	Methane Digester/ manure management
	Barn/Corral/shed/ other structure
	Road Improvements
Planning/Data Collection	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
	Data Collection/Equipment

Attachment B: SAP Selection Criteria

FY 2023-'24 Stewardship Assistance Program Selection and Ranking Criteria				
Name of ranch:			Name of scorer:	
Application date:			Scoring date:	
General project objective:				
Landowner Engagement			No (0)	Yes (1)
Is the landowner prepared to begin work upon selection?				
This project does not have complications which may require extended time to complete?				
Is the project feasible?				
Is the landowner committed to project success and their share of implementation?				
Is the landowner committed to post-project management?				
Will the project positively affect adjacent properties?				
Is the project unlikely to be funded by other means?				
TOTAL SCORE (Project must receive a 4 or higher to continue)				
A minimum score of 2 in EACH of the following categories and a grand total score of 16 is required for selection.				
Prospering Agriculture			No benefit (0)	Low (1)
			Medium (2)	High (3)
Improve soil health	increase rotational grazing; increase carbon sequestration; rest pastures; perennial plant rejuvenation; tillage reduction; compost additions			
Increase forage production	Soil amendments; carbon sequestration; rotational grazing; invasive plant control; plant seedings			
Increase water distribution	More tanks, piping and troughs in other areas of the ranch			
Improve water source(s)	Cleaning/modernizing springs; repairing ponds; wells			
TOTAL				
Ecological Health			No benefit (0)	Low (1)
			Medium (2)	High (3)
Reduce erosion/sedimentation into creeks	Soil bioengineering through planting and seeding; water trough installations			
Increase water infiltration	Rotational grazing; paddock resting; compost amendments			
Improve habitat/promote biodiversity	Riparian plantings; hedgerows; windbreaks; native seedings; invasive plant control			
Reduce invasive species	Targeted grazing; mechanical or chemical treatments; volunteer groups; native species planting; improved livestock management practices			
TOTAL				
Climate Resilience			No benefit (0)	Low (1)
			Medium (2)	High (3)
Reduce GHG emissions	rotational grazing; solar power; methane management; compost amendments (building soil); reduced vehicle usage either on farm or from outside sources (such as developing springs)			
Increase drought resilience	rotational grazing or improved livestock management leading to better soil conditions; water storage and distribution			
Improve wildfire protection	Fuels management; contract grazing; water storage and distribution			
Increase carbon sequestration	Rotational grazing and other improved livestock management methods; compost amendments			
TOTAL				
Thriving Community			No benefit (0)	Low (1)
			Medium (2)	High (3)
Promote new and diverse farmers/ranchers	A project that promotes agricultural succession and lineage.			
	A project that includes new technology or management technique that may be recognized at a regional or state level, and additionally allows for both the ranch and MALT to gain brand recognition.			
Brand exposure /innovation	Project has impact on ecological, economic or cultural components of the ranch to cultivate multigenerational sustainable functionality.			
Increase agricultural resilience	Helps support a producer staying in business and continue being part of the Marin agricultural community			
Contribute to Marin agricultural societal function				
TOTAL				
GRAND TOTAL				