2021 Request for Applications

Deadline: August 6th, 2021

## Overview

National Wildlife Federation is seeking applications from farmers and conservation professionals for the 2021 Conservation Champions program (previously known as Cover Crop Champions). Successful applicants will receive up to **$15,000** in funding to deliver innovative, “out of the box” conservation outreach to producers in their region. Efforts will focus on reaching new audiences that are difficult to reach through traditional approaches. Teams will participate in sought-after communications and outreach training with NWF experts, and receive year-round support for your outreach efforts. This opportunity welcomes applications from the following Mississippi River Basin states: Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin.

## Who are Conservation Champions?

Conservation Champions are teams of innovative farmers and local outreach partners that want to see sustainable agriculture practices become mainstream. Teams are passionate about conservation and also about communications and outreach to other farmers. A Conservation Champion team should consist of three members or more, including at least one **farmer champion** and one **outreach champion**. **Farmer champions** are farmers who personally use conservation practices, know their benefits, and have soil health as a primary mission. They do not need to have experience with outreach, but should have an interest in engaging neighbors and peers to promote conservation practices and be enthusiastic about learning new communication and outreach skills. Their role in the program is to promote cover crops and other practices in their region. **Outreach Champions** are agricultural or natural resource professionals from outreach-focused organizations including conservation districts, university extension, farmer unions, coalitions. Outreach champions usually serve as the point of contact for the team and support farmer champions in planning and implementing outreach.

## What is “out of the box” outreach?

Field days, workshops, and other soil health events that relay valuable information about conservation practice benefits and management have been successful in reaching innovative farmers, but progress in adoption of these practices has stalled. New, out of the box outreach needs to focus on reaching beyond this choir of producers who usually show up at events, and engage more resistant audiences. Past experience, social cues, and economics combine to shape operator decisions. Collaborative, community-based approaches that reduce cultural, technical and economic barriers to implementation will be most effective at substantially increasing conservation adoption. Your proposal should identify new audiences you want to engage; sociological, values-based, farm management, or other barriers to adoption among these audiences; and describe how your plan will help overcome that barrier. As an example, out of the box outreach might include re-framing conservation as a risk management strategy or as a component of farm legacy planning.

NWF’s expertise in social and behavioral science will supplement your farming knowledge and on-the-ground experience to collaboratively develop strategies that appeal to the mindsets and motivations of new audiences. The creative possibilities for your outreach are endless, and funding is flexible to support any creative ideas your team develops.

This is not a grant to fund the type of outreach that you are already doing. This is a targeted outreach program, grounded in social science, specifically designed to encourage non-adopters to start using soil health practices. Experienced NWF staff are here to help you design and implement new outreach approaches to expand and strengthen your outreach impact. We believe that conservation systems can work on all farms and that lack of widespread adoption stems from a communication problem, not a lack of knowledge.

## What does this grant offer?

* Each team can request up to $15,000 to cover the costs of their 18 month outreach plan (Winter 2022 through Spring 2023). This can be spent on staff time or stipends, travel, materials, advertisement, food, etc.
* Sought-after outreach and messaging training that imparts the latest in agricultural outreach science to equip Champions with knowledge and skills for outreach success.
* Year-round, individual support from National Wildlife Federation staff.
* Access to an established network of past and present Champions across the Midwest which offers continued learning, access to updated resources, and opportunities for future collaboration.

## What are Champion responsibilities?

* Each team must carry out innovative outreach activities over 15 months as proposed in their application and approved by NWF.
* Each team is responsible for directly reaching at least 250 farmers with messages on soil health and conservation practices.
* At least three members of each team must attend an in-person outreach and messaging training to be held in **early December, 2021** (exact dates TBD). All costs associated with attending this training will be covered by NWF.
* All members of a champion team are required to view Fall 2021 training webinars hosted by NWF.
* Champions will develop and submit event plans for NWF feedback and approval after completing the training.
* Outreach impact must be measured according to NWF guidance. This will include standardized event surveys and self-reported metrics including tracking acreage influenced. NWF staff will assist with evaluation efforts to help you demonstrate the impact of your outreach activities.
* Champions are expected to engage in a listserv and regularly scheduled semi-monthly meetings, including individual and team check-ins and topic focused discussions.
* Champions will be required to complete a mid-term report by September 1, 2022 and a final report by March 31, 2023.
* **All activities must be completed by March 31, 2023**.

## How will applications be ranked?

Ranking criteria will be estimated impact, feasibility of completion and cost-benefit ratio. Teams that have not participated as Champions before or teams with at least two new members will be prioritized.

## To apply:

1. Fill out the attached Application Form, including an estimated budget for the requested funding amount.
2. Email to Luke Petersen [petersenl@nwf.org] by **Friday, August 6th, 2021.**
3. Selections will be made August 25th, and the program will officially begin in September.

An informational webinar will be held On **Thursday, July 8th at 11 am ET/10 am CT**.
Register and tune in here: [2021 Conservation Champions Informational Webinar](https://nwf-org.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_g6pgZdalT7G9TyO_wRakZw)
Questions before then? Reach out to Luke at petersenl@nwf.org.

# Conservation Champions Application

Please email completed form or any questions to petersenl@nwf.org by August 6th, 2021.

1. Applicant name and contact information (organization if applicable, phone, email, address)
2. List of team participants, with each designated as outreach or farmer champion.
3. Explain your team’s qualifications and/or experience with soil health practices (less than 300 words, in paragraph form or bullet points):
4. Explain your plan for your team to reach at least 250 farmers with messages on soil health practices.
5. Explain why your outreach plan will reach non-adopters better than conventional outreach.
6. Identify the biggest challenges to success you anticipate.
7. Provide a timeline or estimate (Month & Year) for when each major activity will be completed. Events and activities should take place throughout 2022 and and be completed by March 2023.
8. Estimate your budget. There is a limit of $15,000 in total expenditures for each application. Please categorize each line item as either Salary, Benefits, Travel, Meeting/Events, Printing/Electronic, Postage, Supplies/Equipment, or Other. **Note**: for staff time, please separate salary and benefits if applicable. Farmer stipends do not need to be separated. See budget template and example below.

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| SAMPLE BUDGET – Your items and amounts will vary |
| **Item** | **Category** | **Description** | **Budgeted Amount** |
| Outreach partner salary for contributed time | Salaries | 6 days (48 total hours over grant period) for communications with advisees/farmer champions and preparing presentations and educational materials | $1200 |
| Outreach partner associated benefits  | Benefits | Calculated at 25% of salary  | $300 |
| Farmer stipends for contributed time | Salaries | 2 farmers x 7 days (56 hours) for attending events, preparing for speaking engagements, etc | $2800 |
| Travel expenses (estimated) | Travel | 2 Farmers + 1 Outreach partner travel to 4 speaking engagements | $1800 |
| Event space rental | Meetings/Events | 2 events @ $500/day  | $1000 |
| Infiltration test kit | Supplies | For demonstrating cover crop benefits at field days  | $300  |
| Event advertisement  | Printing/electronic | Printing materials, supplies, social media advertisement | $500 |
| **Total** |  |  | **$7,900** |

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| Budget Template |
| **Item** | **Category** | **Description** | **Budgeted Amount** |
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| **Total** |  |  |  |