

About Early Action Grants

An Early Action Grant is a grant from NGOs to governments to help support implementation of the CBD's Program of Work on Protected Areas.

In addition to providing significant technical assistance and tools, TNC has allocated \$4 million in Early Action Grants, with the aim of leveraging significant additional funding and supporting the most important early actions needed to meet the COP-7 commitments.

Disbursement schedule

Approximately \$1 million has been disbursed in fiscal year 2005, and approximately \$1 million in fiscal year 2006. In fiscal year 2007, an additional \$2 million will be disbursed.

Average grant range and eligibility

While the average range is US\$150,000 to \$200,000, some grants will be outside this range. All countries outside of the U.S. with a TNC program are eligible.

Activities to be funded

The precise activities to be supported by these funds will be determined jointly by TNC country programs and their government partners, and will be based primarily on (i) targets with short-term timelines in the COP-7 Program of Action, and (ii) priority activities included in NISP agreements.

Examples of activities in several of the existing NISPs include:

1. National gap assessments: By 2006, complete national gap assessments, drawing on TNC's Ecoregional Planning Assessment data, and complete plans for establishing new protected areas to fill representation gaps.
2. Establish new protected areas on urgent basis: By 2006, designate new protected areas for the highest priority sites that are unprotected.
3. Capacity building: By 2006, complete national capacity building plans and launch new capacity building initiatives.

4. Sustainable finance: By 2006, complete country-level sustainable finance plans and establish new conservation funding mechanisms (e.g., trust funds, debt swaps, tourism fees).

Funding recipients

Funding can go to government staff, consultants and TNC staff; specific country needs will be the major determinant regarding these personnel issues. However, as noted below, these funds need to be jointly programmed by TNC and the government, which may lead in many cases to consultants working under jointly developed terms of reference.

One interesting option that has emerged is to use funding to support a consultant or staff person placed in the appropriate government agency to help drive the NISP process forward, focusing on activities identified as the joint priorities of the government and the TNC Country Programs.

Conditions for grant funds

TNC Country Programs will need to meet a few conditions for ensuring significant impact of Early Action Grant Funds:

Political leverage: Funds need to be used to achieve political leverage (i.e., use funding to help secure national government participation and buy-in for priority conservation activities)

Country-based financial leverage: Funds need to be used to secure significant financial leverage (minimum of 4:1 leverage). We cannot "fudge" this. This has to be additional funding, not just funding already committed. It can include the following:

1. funding provided by TNC;
2. funding provided by other international NGOs, public donors, foundations and recipient governments;
3. committed funding that is steered in a significantly different direction to support NISP activities;
4. in-kind support (e.g., staff time, workshop and equipment costs, etc.) by the government, NGOs and other actors besides TNC.

Mutual programming of funds: Funds need to be mutually programmed with the national government, but through mechanisms that ensure adequate levels of TNC input over the use of these funds.

Concrete deliverables and reporting: Funds need to be allocated to activities that generate concrete deliverables over a two-year timeframe. TNC country programs will need to report back to External Affairs on results at the end of each year during the life of the grant (very brief reports).

Decision-making for fund allocation: Funds will be managed by a two-person team in External Affairs: Sheldon Cohen (Director of Conservation Finance and Policy) and Randy Curtis (Director of Multilateral and Bilateral Agencies). TNC Country Programs will submit short applications (e.g., 2 pages) for funds. The Fund Management team will then consult with each individual Country Program on specific issues or questions.

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do NISPs need to be signed by the Ministry of External Affairs, or can they be signed by other Government Agency e.g. the National Environmental Agency?

Most of the current NISPs have been signed with just the Ministry of Environment. Some, like Jamaica, involve three government agencies. Countries need to decide what constellation of government agency(s) signatories give the agreement sufficient political weight.

2. Could a general MOU with the National Environmental Agency count as a NISP or does there need to be a signed document that specifically delineates the NISP objectives (gap assessment, new protected areas, capacity building and sustainable finance)?

NISPs can be new agreements or modification of existing agreements. In either case, the idea is to structure collaboration by a coalition of NGOs and government agencies (and donors if possible!) around a collaborative agenda for implementing the COP-7 commitments. The gap assessment, new protected areas, capacity building and sustainable finance targets all have early timetables and have been included in many NISPs. But signatories of the NISP need to decide its contents. It is also important to include explicit language in NISP referring to COP-7 Program of Work on Protected Areas, governments formally adopted these ambitious commitments, and we want to hold them to it (and help them meet the commitments).

3. What is the format of the agreement, and what must governments specifically commit to?

There is not a specific format. It is important to think of NISPs not as a possible source of modest funding from our Early Action Grant Fund, but more importantly as a way to establish a comprehensive partnership between a government, a coalition of other major NGOs, and donors, focused on supporting effective implementation of the COP-7 commitments.