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Reflections + Recommendations on Round 6 TA Efforts

Final Technical Assistance Report

Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation Program

July 2021

This report summarizes the Cultivate team’s reflections on recruiting applicants and delivering technical assistance (TA) to Round 6 *Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation Program* (SALC) applicants. The overall objective of the TA program is to assist cities and counties and other qualifying entities, in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California, in preparing competitive applications for the SALC grant. This report includes reflections on the process, outcomes, findings, lessons learned, and best practices.

#### Recruiting Technical Assistance Recipients and Helping to Form Applicant Teams

##### 1. Early Recruitment

During the first two phases of the technical assistance services (spring and summer 2019), the Cultivate team conducted extensive outreach to identify individuals and entities, in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California, interested in applying for Round 6 SALC planning grants and to subsequently identify three “hosts” willing to help organize SALC workshops and invite key stakeholders to learn about the SALC program and its desired outcomes. As summarized in the September 2019 Memo (see addendum), the Cultivate team organized workshops in San Diego, Ventura, and Stanislaus Counties. From these gatherings the Cultivate team was able to screen for readiness, understand the opportunities and challenges of the local agricultural community and planning agencies, and assess initial interest in SALC technical assistance. Through this process, we began to identify local stakeholders that advocated for pursuing a SALC grant in each region. We identified several themes that have been relevant from the early phases of engagement and have continued to be relevant throughout our TA into the final development of applications. These common themes are:

* Lack of familiarity with SALC and a ‘planning approach’ to securing the future of agriculture,
* Lack of city and/or county representation and leadership,
* Planning fatigue and lack of resources,
* Lack of trust and “connection” between ag community and city and county government agencies,
* Lack of capacity in regional agencies to take on additional long range planning projects,
* Difficulty in identifying an eligible applicant,
* Lack of leadership and awareness around pursuing agricultural preservation and long range planning for the viability of the ag economy,
* Distrust of “ag preservation” goals that would perceivably hinder housing growth and development needs, and
* Weariness around addressing the “so-called” climate crisis, GHG reduction targets and long term sustainability approaches.

In the early phases of engagement, we also learned that interest in initiating a SALC project is more likely to come from organizations other than public agencies, such as Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), Farm Bureaus, and other agriculture-based community organizations.[[1]](#footnote-1) As such, this guided the type of technical assistance and training we designed to help build effective, inclusive and cohesive teams with viable project ideas.

##### 2. Program Training

In Fall 2019, after consultation with the Department of Conservation (DoC), we selected three communities where we found promising potential for SALC applicants to support: San Diego, Ventura, and Inland Empire. We conducted a second round of workshops in each community aimed at moving the key stakeholders from the initial phase of deciding to apply for a SALC grant to a more formalized and organized stakeholder commitment and conversation about how SALC can serve the community’s goals. During these workshops we reinforced the notion of broadening the set of partners and stakeholders who will have roles in crafting the application and building a scope for the SALC project, as well as identifying community leaders who will champion the project as a complementary effort to existing local and regional planning efforts. For these workshops, we created a “Training Guide”, or in print form a “Flipbook”, to serve as a guide and framework for developing core and advisory teams, viable SALC project ideas, and the process on how to apply for a SALC grant (see Flip Book in addendum). As summarized in the January 2020 Memo (see addendum), we facilitated workshops with the following key topics of discussion:

* Developing a SALC project around interrelated community goals,
* Identifying community champions,
* Gathering a diverse set of partners and stakeholders that represented the whole community to contribute to the application and project,
* Leveraging existing regional planning efforts and getting a deeper understanding of the intersections with SALC, (such as General Plan updates, SGMA),
* Mapping the landscape to understand the current context of agriculture and to better assess the challenges and the multibenefit opportunities that agriculture supports, and
* Crosswalking an agricultural vision and strategies with other local and regional plans and strategies.

The delivery of the training topics was intended to help stakeholders organize themselves to identify individuals that should be a part of the core team who could thoughtfully consider local and regional conditions for SALC project ideas, recruit effective champions, and develop a SALC application with community wide input from appropriate stakeholders. During this phase of the TA, the Cultivate team became familiar with who was “rising up” to lead the application process and advocate for SALC in the region, which stakeholders were effective at championing it among elected officials and other key figures, and which stakeholders needed wooing to support the application and an eventual project. We observed that for each region in which we were working, the level and type of technical assistance varied according to the dynamics of local and historic relationships among the stakeholders, and according to their knowledge of and experience in local and regional planning efforts. These dynamics also dictated how effective SALC advocates were in building and telling the “stories” that could convey compelling reasons for why SALC is a powerful complementary planning effort for the region.

###### Building Trust Among Agencies and Community Organizations as Early as Possible Saves Time

In San Diego, the RCD of Greater San Diego led the effort to build a SALC application team and project ideas. While they come with solid expertise in land management projects and a strong relationship with the Farm Bureau, their familiarity with local and regional planning efforts was not as strong and their relationship with the San Diego County Planning Department was weak, with both parties skeptical of each other. While this was potentially a red flag, through our training workshop and subsequent engagement with them, we emphasized the importance of having the County as a key partner to help shape the application and project scope. In this case, the relationship between the RCD and the County was relatively new. Building trust and the ability of the RCD to effectively find key leaders within the County as trusted partners in the early phases of the project was slow. The lesson learned from working in this community is that early technical assistance should focus on helping to build stronger relationships among SALC advocates and County leadership just as much as helping advocates to effectively convey SALC as an appropriate planning effort for the region. Not “hooking” the County leadership early, results in lost opportunity to conceptualize how a SALC project would fit into existing planning efforts and would likely mean that the project leaders will spend more time during the initial phases of the project making the case for why the County should be an active partner (versus solely advisory) and integrated into existing county planning efforts[[2]](#footnote-2).

##### 3. Organizational Structure for a SALC Team

As discussed above, the dynamics within communities among the counties, cities, RCDs, farm bureaus, and other community organizations determined how we focused our technical assistance and ultimately, it determined the make-up of the core team that led the SALC application. In all three counties where we delivered technical assistance, the counties and the cities were not the primary advocates for pursuing a SALC application and the organizations leading the development of the application were not eligible entities per the SALC guidelines. Most eligible entities are already overburdened with existing mandated long-range planning projects and within those projects, staff often feel that they are already addressing the challenges that SALC seeks to address and are rarely willing to consider alternative tools or examine how SALC funding could compliment and/or leverage current planning efforts (such as Climate Action Plans, General Plan Updates).

As such, in the case of the three counties, this resulted in “project leads” that are non-agency organizations whose leadership stepped up to carry the torch on pursuing the SALC application, and “applicant leads” that are eligible entities with whom the project leads partnered to put forth an eligible application. In San Diego and the Inland Empire, both project leads are the regional RCDs and in Ventura the project lead is the Ventura County Farm Bureau. Both San Diego and Inland Empire teamed with their Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCo), which is an eligible applicant lead. In Ventura the Farm Bureau teamed with the County where the planning department stepped up as the applicant lead.

There are both benefits and compromises in having a non-agency organization serve as the project lead. The benefit of this composition is that the work of these non-agency organizations brings a perspective that is not always thoroughly considered in county and city planning. The non-agency organizations that have taken the role of SALC advocates, closely understand the issues that affect agriculture such as the value chain economy, land management, water, labor, succession planning, equity, etc. and so are well positioned to present on-the-ground challenges and opportunities that the agricultural community faces. On the other hand, the capacity to integrate meaningful SALC goals into official planning processes is compromised when a county or city does not take a lead role in developing project concepts. Unless counties and cities are on board with SALC from the beginning, non-agency organizations are not necessarily poised to develop a broad frame that connects the dots on how local agricultural issues fit within the context of existing planning mandates. This includes, in particular, the nexus between protecting critical agricultural lands and accommodating regional population growth with economic development, housing needs, urban and rural water demand, and transportation, all while meeting greenhouse gas reduction goals. The Cultivate TA team recognized this challenge and worked with TA recipients in building the knowledge needed to both “frame ” the SALC opportunity to community leaders and to develop thoughtful SALC applications. Developing this broad frame and crafting a persuasive “story” with data and analysis, will likely continue to be one of the biggest challenges for SALC advocates in convincing counties and cities to engage and participate in meaningful ways. We found that discussing the fact that SALC brings “investment” dollars to the community was often a good way to start to frame the conversation.[[3]](#footnote-3)

###### Crosswalking: Leveraging General Plan Implementation Can Help Sell SALC as a Complementary Planning Project

In Ventura County, the County Planning Division was on board with the Farm Bureau to pursue the SALC effort from the very beginning (perhaps both entities capitalizing on SALC as an opportunity to bridge an historically skeptical relationship between the agricultural community and the County). When the Ventura County Farm Bureau presented the opportunity to the County to participate, they were in the final phases of the County General Plan Update, which had already included a new agricultural element. The Cultivate team and the local farm bureau as well as their partner, the Nature Conservancy, presented SALC as an opportunity to implement general plan programs. This concept of “crosswalking” SALC with other local and regional planning efforts was key in grabbing the attention of the Çounty. The County planning director and the agricultural commissioner attended the technical assistance training workshop where stakeholders developed initial concepts for the SALC application and project. Their attendance, engagement, and receptivity set the stage for meaningful collaboration early on and the County planning staff continued to work closely with the Farm Bureau in developing the application.

##### 4. Partnerships and Community Engagement

The Cultivate team determined that a series of in-person workshops within the local communities would be the most effective way to introduce the SALC opportunity, gather likely partners, and assist in starting meaningful conversations about the challenges they are facing and how SALC could provide long term planning investment in the viability of agriculture in their Counties. These face-to-face 2-hour meetings set an early tone for the kind of collaboration that would be needed and allowed the Cultivate team to begin developing the professional relationships needed to successfully support the local efforts.

As outsiders and experts in planning, agricultural preservation and community engagement, and representing the SALC program as TA providers, we were able to bring an objective perspective and methodical approach on how to assemble a partner team and how to assess community needs and goals that a SALC grant could address. During the training workshops, we presented concepts in the “training book” and then facilitated a conversation around the following key questions:

* *What are the priorities in the County that a SALC Plan should address?*
* *What’s needed to keep ag viable?*
* *What would be your ideal outcome from a SALC planning project?*

By keeping the questions simple and having a broad set of stakeholders at the table, the facilitated discussions revealed many shared concerns about the future of agriculture in their communities. This established a sense of shared need or opportunity around agricultural viability and land conversion that encouraged participants to begin the process of imagining how a SALC project could address those needs/opportunities. We encouraged the group to think about the bigger context of finding a balance between preserving agricultural viability, meeting housing needs, and reducing GHG emissions. Our goal was to shift perceptions of SALC as “just another State program,” to exploring how a SALC planning grant could be used to meet clear and agreed on local needs. Having stakeholders consider these questions early on allowed us, as TA providers, to help project leads hone in on how best to frame up the SALC opportunity to pitch it to and gain interest from leaders in their communities. From these workshops and subsequent conference calls, the language and requirements of SALC became familiar to the project teams, giving them additional grounding to thoughtfully develop project scopes for their applications.

###### Invested Time in Community Engagement Should be Top Priority in the Pre-Application Process

Even in the absence of having TA providers, SALC advocates would benefit from engaging stakeholders in their communities early on as soon as they consider applying for a SALC planning grant. To develop strong applications and ultimately stronger projects and long-term outcomes, communities should start stakeholder dialogue around community needs, develop strong partner teams, and identify leaders from the region to champion SALC, as early as the pre-application phase. Special attention should be paid to including historically underrepresented voices, including farm workers, small farms, farm product value added producers, and community groups. The SALC guidelines should be designed to allow ample time in the pre-application phase to provide time for communities to address these essential steps in building social capital around potential SALC projects. The guidelines could provide a “suggestions” section that helps applicants during the pre-application phase not only to answer the pre-application questions, but to effectively organize the social capital needed to begin setting up a strong application and project. The TA team designed the SALC “training guide” as a resource that can be used beyond the technical assistance program and could be linked in the guidelines to help communities facilitate discussions and organize partners. The guidelines in the past have not provided enough leeway for communities to come together to answer the pre-applications questions as thoughtfully as they need to, with ample time to effectively invest in community engagement upfront.

##### 5. The Importance of Framing

As noted above, one of the key challenges the TA team observed was helping project teams understand how to develop a broad frame that connects the dots on how local agricultural issues fit within the context of existing planning mandates, in particular ***the nexus between protecting critical agricultural lands and accommodating regional population growth with economic development, housing needs, equity issues, urban and rural water demand, and transportation, all while meeting greenhouse gas reduction goals***. Part of this is due to the reality that gathering stakeholders from various perspectives and “silos” will undoubtedly pose the challenge of threading a comprehensive set of community concerns and goals into a SALC project that connects the dots to address those broad concerns. Indeed, this is what the SALC planning grant is intended to do. Throughout the TA phases, the Cultivate team worked with project leads and stakeholders to help them understand that SALC is not intended to be solely about preserving agricultural land and that a successful SALC project provides a vision on how protecting agriculture is part of a holistic planning effort for their region, balanced with housing needs, economic development, GHG reductions, and other regional goals.

The “training guide” addresses the question of how to frame SALC projects in several sections and in our workshops we emphasized the need to develop focus areas with an integrated systems perspective. The TA team recognized that framing the issues as interrelated and interdependent was at times challenging to the project leads, both in “selling” SALC to a diversity of community partners and leaders, and in building the SALC scope for the application. We continued to provide guidance to help convey thoughtful messages throughout the application process.

It is important to make the concept of “multiple benefits” tangible for communities. While it is useful to reiterate the notion of multiple benefits as an outcome of agricultural conservation, talking about “multiple benefits” in an abstract sense is not compelling enough for community leaders to understand how meeting SALC goals translates into positive tangible outcomes for their constituents and their communities. As the SALC program matures, it would be beneficial to provide prospective applicants with access to case studies, anecdotes and data showing how past SALC investments have had multiple positive economic, social and environmental impacts - information that can be used to “sell” the project to community leaders. (Refer to Flipbook graphic below).

###### Make it Tangible and Relatable!

A key example of the importance of framing was with the Inland Empire project team. The TA team worked with the lead applicant, the San Bernardino LAFCo, as they prepared for a commission meeting seeking approval of the SALC application. As a commission composed of county and city leaders, the staff was aware that the climate change frame was not going to sell the project and so we advised them to focus on the tangible economic benefits of planning for agricultural and land conservation. Often, communities are not aware that there is a multiplier effect on conservation easement investments as well as monetary value of the benefits supplied by various ecosystem services. For the San Bernardino LAFco meeting, framing around the economic benefits helped and the commission unanimously voted to approve the SALC application (see addendum for Staff Report)! For those communities where climate change mitigation is not recognized (or is misunderstood) as a community goal, it may be more useful to frame the issues around how conserving land can have direct economic impact or can provide the public savings in the way of avoided costs (such as groundwater recharge as a means for flood protection).

*“Although we highlighted the Commission’s concerns at the hearing, we also outlined the fact that the planning grant really intends to strike the right balance between growth and development needs and where to conserve local agricultural lands, and that LAFCO’s role is being a facilitator and using this as forum to answer the question on how to honor the need for housing and at the same time where are we are supposed to conserve agricultural lands. At the hearing is where we emphasized that this is not just about LAFCO but that this is for the community and collectively coming up with a shared plan that promotes smart growth.”* - LAFCo Staff

##### 6. Exploration of Tools and Strategies

Early on the TA team provided guidance on how and where to look for tools and strategies that fit local circumstances, through phone conversations, workshop presentations and in the training guide. While this helped applicants and their stakeholders imagine the types of strategies that might address the needs in their regions and develop preliminary concepts, the application process is not the point at which project teams hone in on and solidify these strategies. It may be useful to provide some technical assistance or workshops annually for current round grant recipients, as they implement their projects, that provides case studies of successful tools that past SALC recipients have already implemented.

During this phase, project teams would benefit from direct dialogue with past SALC recipients to hear what strategies were adopted and how they navigated the politics of those decisions with stakeholders, county/city staff, and elected officials. DoC and SGC could organize this via online “knowledge exchange” workshops. As the SALC program grows in popularity, this could create a cohort of individuals that exchange knowledge, explore creative tools and strategies, and help innovate in the field of planning and investing in agriculture. This would be particularly useful as many traditional ag planning tools such as mitigation, ag zoning, ag enterprise zones, while still useful, are based on another era in planning in which communities were not facing issues such as SGMA regulations, GHG reduction targets, and most recently, Covid. SALC is an opportunity for locals to make sense of and innovate how these traditional planning tools fit within the circumstances of their communities. Exchanging knowledge is often the best way for this type of innovation to happen.

###### Encouraging Innovation on Agricultural Preservation Strategies and Avoiding “requirements”.

As noted throughout, encouraging applicants to explore a diverse and interdisciplinary set of tools around ag preservation is important. As we have come to learn, there is no “one size fits all” for each community. For example, the baseline requirement for mitigation at 2:1 was a non-starter for the Inland Empire applicant and they were concerned that they would have to take that tool off the table. We encouraged them to think about other possible tools, and to think interdisciplinarily, in addressing the long term vision of their community. The need to encourage applicants to be creative is critical, especially around exploring a diverse set or approach to mitigation.

##### 7. Project Implementation

In Spring 2021, the Cultivate team completed two sets of deliverables: 1) Two workshops for Round 6 SALC grantees and 2) Support on preparing and holding kick off meetings for TA recipients. This set of work helped to further inform the Cultivate team’s insights on the needs of grant recipients and deepen the understanding of how SALC relates to the overall planning and engagement process with communities.

###### SALC Kick-Off Workshop - April 2021

In April 2021, the Cultivate team worked with DoC and SGC staff to design and facilitate a “kick-off” workshop targeted for all Round 6 awardees and their partners. The workshop was intended to help grantees and their partners think through the major themes that they will need to address as they kick off their projects within their communities. With a panel involving past grantees from the City of Reedley, Mariposa County, and Santa Clara County, the Cultivate team facilitated a discussion that allowed panelists to share how they kicked off their projects, what their engagement process looked like, what data they accessed, and how they gained political support. The following paraphrases some highlights from the panelist discussion as well as breakout room discussions.

* When showing an analysis of VMT and climate impacts, some of the most impactful information was talking about the data showing how urban land can account for 70 times more greenhouse gas emissions per acre than farmland.
* Having conversations early on with the DoC and getting their input was very helpful.
* Having political buy-in was a huge factor in successful projects.
* Bringing together a coalition of agricultural interests and environmentalists to the board of supervisors to show that they agree on a vision, was an important step in the SALC planning and implementation.
* In community engagement, it’s important to try to reach all generations, including youth, so that the vision for agriculture in a community has standing for generations to come.

###### SALC Community Engagement Workshop - June 2021

In June 2021, the Cultivate team facilitated a second workshop designed to help grantees and their partners think about community engagement in light of the various stakeholders that might contribute a voice to a SALC project. The panel consisted of three individuals with recent, innovative community engagement experience: Frank Chen (County of Santa Barbara);

Valerie Perez (UCANR); Maria Lara (City of McFarland). They addressed topics such as best practices for community engagement in a diverse state, typical pitfalls in engagement, reaching communities that historically have not been part of a planning effort, and how good engagement can be translated into good policy. The following paraphrases some highlights from the panelist discussion as well as breakout room discussions.

* Connect with hard-to-reach farmers by asking others that have previously engaged with them to introduce you, such as a resource conservation district (RCD). Lean on and leverage existing relationships with other organizations.
* Host many workshops with the same materials in the same place - be out there frequently. The goal is to build trust first.
* Consider providing a stipend for people to participate.
* Attend parent-teacher open houses after school hours and get to know the community.
* Reach out at churches, park and recreation events, schools. Set up a tent at local community events on the weekends.
* Create bilingual materials and ensure that translation is available and on-hand.
* Be visual and offer people different ways of expressing themselves, e.g index cards, raffles, art.
* Work with art classes at the local high school and use kids’ art in outreach materials. Then work with the kids on the planning project.
* Community engagement isn’t as much inviting participants to “your house”; it’s getting invited to “their house”.
* Don’t flood people with too much information. Be concise at first, then go into depth. Figure out what your community needs from you.
* To carry forward the community’s voice, have an ally to help make changes within the institutional structures.
* Encourage elected officials to hear from constituents at engagement events so they can hear and learn.
* Allow for one-on-one time after presentations at community engagement events.
* Provide more time than you think is needed - it takes time to build relationships.

###### Kick-off Preparations and Meetings with Technical Assistance Recipients

In Spring 2021 all three TA recipients prepared to kick off their projects, each facing the same challenge of convening their partners and stakeholders via online forums. San Bernardino and Ventura opted to engage the Cultivate team to help build their kick-off meeting agendas and to contribute insights during the kick-off meetings, while San Diego chose to get feedback up front and hold a meeting with their community without assistance from the Cultivate team.

In this final stage of work, the projects from these three regions transformed from theoretical concepts and nascent relationships, to an official implementation phase in which the project leads and their partners established solid relationships with one another and were able to move forward as a team. While a fair amount of partnership building remains in the future months, the Cultivate team observed that the SALC planning process (both the application process and the initial implementation phase) pushes the envelope on typical planning models and encourages communities to use a fresh lens on how to collaborate on interrelated yet traditionally siloed community issues. The Cultivate team supported the development of SALC projects around building nontraditional collaborations such as LAFCos and resource conservation districts, organizations whose work is largely relevant to the issues that SALC seeks to solve yet have not historically played a formal role in directly planning for the future of agriculture at a regional scale.

##### 8. Round 6 Guidelines and Application - Recommendations for Future Rounds

The following are specific reflections on the Round 6 SALC guidelines and application and recommendations for future SALC funding rounds.

1. **Release final guidelines and grant timeline at least 9 months in advance of application deadline.** As noted above, applicants need ample time to effectively organize the social capital needed to begin setting up a successful application and project. Most applicants will only start organizing during the pre-proposal phase, which in the case of 2020 only gave them from March to July. Four months does not provide enough leeway for communities to come together to get approvals to apply for the grant, assemble a broad stakeholder team, consider project ideas and begin framing the project, effectively sell the project to elected officials, and thoughtfully answer the pre-applications questions. Projects and longer-term outcomes will benefit considerably with more time to effectively invest in community engagement, provide the necessary social capital and political buy-in to shift traditional planning approaches and begin to open the door (and minds) for innovation.
2. **Encourage meaningful stakeholder conversations and convenings (virtual if necessary) as a part of the pre-proposal process** and provide a framework for communities to do this. For example, provide a section in the guidelines that discusses the importance of stakeholder engagement in the pre-proposal phase and provide suggestions on how to do this engagement. This section can link to the training guide (Flipbook) which outlines the type of stakeholders to engage and topics that are useful to address. For Round 6, the technical assistance recipients had the advantage of facilitated stakeholder conversations early on and as TA providers we observed how valuable these conversations were to help stakeholders gain an understanding of the intent of SALC, spread the word and promote SALC, and explore how a SALC project fits into existing community planning efforts. The earlier a community begins discussing their needs and the partners that can collectively address those needs, the stronger the application will be.
3. **Amplify the SALC Program and its impact on California communities while providing additional resources and support to potential applicants.**  As noted in our report, providing a place where potential applicants may access a library of resources and guidance for understanding how to fill out the application, attend a workshop, connect with other agencies that are implementing SALC projects and/or read recent case studies regarding successful SALC projects could be an effective way in reinforcing the impact of SALC as well as to build a cohort of SALC expertise, stories, training and knowledge. For example, the SALC website could have a “resources” library where short case studies could be posted, a “sample” answer to one of the application questions could be posted, a clarification on any of the application questions, or a “did you know” question that describes a recent SALC success. In Spring 2021, the Cultivate team successfully delivered two workshops, one focused on kicking off projects and one on community engagement. Post-workshop surveys indicated that participants are eager to continue to connect online. They also indicated that panel presentations followed by breakout groups is an effective format for workshops. Future topics of interest include agriculture and sustainability, land use conflicts, alternatives to easements, and overcoming obstacles in grant projects. Based on comments during workshops and survey responses, convening via an online format has proven to be a successful method in building a network of “SALC practitioners”.
4. **As jurisdictions adopt Environmental Justice Elements for their General Plans**, consider adding a question about how the proposed project will be consistent with and help implement this element (or if not yet adopted, how a SALC project can contribute to the goals of the element per OPR General Plan Guidelines). While the priority population checklist provides an opportunity for the applicant to show their intent to benefit vulnerable communities, it is too generic to assess the true nature of how this work will happen through a SALC project.
5. **Revise the Priority Population Checklist and provide additional support on its intent and how it fits into a SALC project.** We found that this important piece of the application was often the most misunderstood and confusing. We recommend that the checklist is refined and there is additional guidance or incentives provided in the guidelines regarding the importance of this portion of the application and the types of benefits that might result from SALC projects.
6. **Include focused sessions with DoC and SGC to review Final Guidelines and Application with SALC-TA teams in future scopes of work**. Our recommendation would be to ensure that TA teams, the DoC and SGC review the final guidelines and application together to be sure that there is a full understanding of the intent behind the guidelines and application, and if there have been any notable adjustments to either the guidelines or application since the last round.

##### Highlights and Feedback from Technical Assistance Recipients[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Cultivate team led brief follow-up interviews with the three TA recipients after applications had been submitted to gather additional feedback on the TA program. Below is a summary of the questions the Cultivate team asked, and selected responses from TA recipients.

###### What was most helpful?

“We may have not pursued this without the TA team. They helped us in understanding whether this would be fruitful for us to pursue.”

“Helpful to have all materials early on to help shape conversation.”

“The check-in calls really helped. They were very helpful in framing the conversation, to identify the issues, and then talking through them was important. This is a collective effort, and the calls helped me a lot in putting together a presentation that turned the tide. There still might be hesitation but we were able to provide [the LAFCo commission] with a better understanding.”

“Holding our hand through a confusing and complicated process. There is a lot of bureaucracy [in the forms] and it was nice to have a guide.”

“The kick-off planning meeting was helpful in determining the key stakeholders and trying to keep it a tight group with appropriate players. It was great to not have to facilitate the meeting so that we [the local host] could fully participate and be a part of the conversation.”

“The regular check ins and the meeting goals on the timeline helped us move it along.”

“The timeline was helpful to see where we should be at each stage.”

“It was helpful to know the timing of the response on pre-proposals from DoC. Having the TA team as the go-between is helpful.”

“Having the TA team to move us forward and getting constant prods to move on to next tasks in process .”

“Getting input on drafts.”

###### *What else would have been helpful?*

“It seems we didn’t answer all the questions in the pre-proposal correctly. More input on this would have been helpful.”

“Lay out the steps and process very specifically. e.g. this is what we’re doing; these are the people you need; and this is where you need to start. Be more concise on all the steps and what our role is.”

“We will want help on who to pick as contractors. Need help to understand who will truly lead us in the work.”

“Technical writing. It’s helpful to have a blend between local knowledge and technical knowledge in the answers to the application questions.”

“One frustration we had was that we were not eligible to lead and had to move to LAFCo. Can we allow RCDs to lead in the future?”

“It’s important to make sure all links are live and up to date on the SALC website. Priority population checklist links were funky so it made it even more confusing.”

“Having more visits would have been more helpful. We need more in person rallying to keep excitement alive.”

###### *What did you get out of the workshops?*

The workshops were very helpful. It made us very enthusiastic about the program and we decided to be involved at that point.”

“You need a facilitator to get through the first meetings. And having the technical side at those meetings was great.”

“These were the biggest strengths of the technical assistance. The whole program itself came together, on what it's trying to accomplish. What we struggled with were the partnerships involved and getting decision makers at the table.”

“We struggled with the global view and getting it down to concise steps. I enjoyed the workshops because they brought the in-the-cloud conceptual ideas into more finite steps that made it easier.”

“The hardest part was getting the right collaboration at the table and being in a position to achieve the work.”

“It was important to have an outside group and facilitator to ‘push’ the SALC program. It was also important that Joseph knew people in the room.”

###### *Was the Flip Book helpful?*

“I thought it was helpful. Not everyone received it but it was helpful in terms of having something people can reference. I referenced it and it was helpful to get everyone on the same page.”

“I thought it was great. I looked at it the other day randomly. It is clear and easy to read. It could be shared with many other organizations in the future.”

“The concept is helpful but I found it a little confusing. It could be refined a little bit. I was confused about whether it addressed acquisition grant or planning grant, pre-proposal or proposal.”

###### *Did the TA team have the right mix of skills?*

“I thought yes. A part of the grant writing process required idea development and content itself. The ideas that the TA team presented were insightful and allowed us to think of this work in a different light. Having more of those ideas in the future could be helpful.”

“Good mix. The only thing that could have helped is having a southern California perspective to see challenges specifically.”

### Addendum

September 2019 Memo (Summary of Findings on Initial Outreach)

SALC TA Slideshow June 2019 (for Open Houses)

January 2020 Memo (Summary of Findings on TA Training Workshops)

SALC TA Slideshow Nov-Dec 2019 (for Training Workshops)

SALC TA Training Guide (Flipbook)

San Bernardino LAFCo July 2020 Staff Report

1. These active proponents of agriculture are likely to continue to be key leaders in future SALC efforts. Modification to program guidelines to enable a wider class of entities to be eligible for SALC funding may increase SALC programs around the State. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As California’s agricultural footprint, physical, economic, and cultural, shrinks and the demands on urban counties increases, the necessity of finding early and creative ways to encourage positive county engagement will increase. Linking SALC to other State programs and funding may be effective in gaining additional positive county engagement. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Agricultural land preservation through easements and other methods will continue to be a controversial approach in most counties with high risk of these lands loss to urbanization. Competing state and regional demands, particularly around housing stock, will continue to force county agencies into difficult choices. High land values make landowners wary of less than top dollar valuations. Linking SALC to housing by providing relief from some housing demands (stock or code) may make it easier to meet the State’s twin goals of increasing housing and reducing GHGs, which in turn may increase interest in the SALC program. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Included interviews with project leads from San Diego, Ventura, and Inland Empire in September 2020. Some quotes are paraphrased for clarity. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)