

STRATEGIES FOR GRANT FUNDING COMMUNITY-BASED, HOLISTIC FOOD SECURITY WORK

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Agenda

- Introduction
- Why Pursue Federal and State Agricultural Grants?
- *De-mystifying* the Grant Process
- Preparing your Organization for Future Grant Opportunities

Why Pursue Federal Agricultural Grants?

- USDA Strategic Plan (FY22-FY26)
 - Strategic Goal 4: “**Make Safe, Nutritious Food Available to All Americans**”
 - **Food Security is one of six priorities** designated federal agricultural funding.
- At least 5 or more recurring + pilot grant programs intended to fund non-profits *every year*.
 - Some programs have award rates of 30% or greater!
- Millions (\$) in funding available to support additional staffing, operational supplies, contractors, administrative costs and more.



NAVIGATING FEDERAL AND STATE GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

De-mystifying Programmatic Language

Grant Listings – Key Points

1. Find the RFA/NOFO/RFP Document(s)
2. Identify Due Dates
3. Identify Eligibility and Project Requirements
4. Identify Scoring Criteria/Rubric and Priority Points
5. Follow the program's desired application format

NOFO/RFA/RFP: Identify Basic Information

First Page(s):

Due Date

Basic Requirements

Opportunity Number

Program Summary

	United States Department of Agriculture	National Institute of Food and Agriculture	www.nifa.usda.gov nifa@usda.gov	
REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program				
MODIFICATIONS: 10/24/2023 – This RFA has been modified from the original announcement. Edits are indicated using track changes and red font so the public/potential applicants can identify the changes within the solicitation. Edits appear on pages: 1, 2, 7, 9, and 23				
FUNDING YEAR: Fiscal Year (FY) 2024				
LETTER OF INTENT DEADLINE: Not Required				
APPLICATION DEADLINE: October 30, 2023 November 6, 2023 5:00 P.M. Eastern Time				
ANTICIPATED PROGRAM FUNDING: \$4,800,000				
AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL AWARD RANGE: \$25,000 - \$400,000				
FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: USDA-NIFA-CFP-009982				
ASSISTANCE LISTING NUMBER: 10.225				

Example 1: Community Food Projects Competitive Grant Program

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Example 2: Value-Added Producer Grant Program

NOFO/RFA/RFP: Identify Eligibility, Project Requirements

B. Evaluation Criteria

NIFA will use the evaluation criteria below for **Planning Project applications**, listed in priority order of importance to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. How well the proposed project assists applicants, eligible entities, and others in understanding the primary goals of the CFPCGP which are to: (1)(a) meet the food needs of people with low incomes through food distribution, community outreach to assist in participation in Federally assisted nutrition programs, or improving access to food as part of a comprehensive service; (b) increase the self-reliance of communities with low incomes in providing for their own food needs; and (c) promote comprehensive responses to local food access, farm, and nutrition issues; or (2) meet specific State, local, or neighborhood food and agriculture needs for (a) equipment necessary for the efficient operation of a project; (b) planning for long-term solutions; or (c) the creation of innovative marketing activities that mutually benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers;

(i) *Planning grants*. A planning grant is used to fund development of a defined program of economic planning activities to determine the viability of a potential value-added venture, specifically for paying a qualified consultant to conduct and develop a feasibility study, business plan, and/or marketing plan associated with the processing and/or marketing of a value-added agricultural product.

(ii) *Working Capital Grants*. This type of grant provides funds to operate a value-added project, specifically to pay the eligible project expenses directly related to the processing and/or marketing of the value-added products

Control-F to Find:

Eligibility

Match Requirements

Program Priorities

Acceptable Project Types

Example 1: Eligibility Requirements

Example 2: Project Types

NOFO/RFA/RFP: Identify Scoring Criteria

- Every Federal Grant Program is required to disclose its evaluation and/or scoring criteria.
- **READ BETWEEN THE LINES!**
- Consider Priority Points, Funding Baskets, Awarding Agency's Desired Project Types.

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2. How significant are the food security issues that will be addressed by the proposed project; is there an informative description of the community, its characteristics, assets, and needs; How specifically will the community named in this description benefit from the proposed project;
3. The appropriateness of the goals, objectives and outcomes of the project and how these will be achieved to invest in building the capacity of the applicant and its partners in food security efforts and policies. Proposed project activities are designed to address one or more of the following outcomes, which will be given equal weight: (i) Develop linkages between two or more sectors of the food system; (ii) Support the development of entrepreneurial projects; (iii) Innovative linkages between the for-profit and nonprofit food sectors; (iv) Long-term activities and multi-system, interagency approaches with collaborations from multiple stakeholders that build the long-term capacity of communities to address the food and agricultural problems of the community, such as food policy councils and food planning associations; or (v) Develop new resources and strategies to help reduce food insecurity in the community and prevent foods insecurity in the future.
4. The relevance of the organization's experience that are involved in the proposed project, including the applicant entity, and the type and extent of support that other organizations will be providing. Applicant organizations demonstrate a history of commitment to and direct involvement in food security projects in communities with low incomes or in communities with low-income groups, as well as success in outreach to low-income participants. The qualifications of staff involved with the proposed project and/or organizational leadership reflect the expertise necessary to carry out the proposed activities or similar types of activities. Experience in and connections with the community will be considered as important as academic or professional credentials in this regard; and
5. The timeline for accomplishing project goals, objectives and outcomes is realistic and achievable.

NIFA will use the evaluation criteria for **Community Food Projects** below, listed in priority order of importance, to review applications submitted in response to this RFA:

1. The appropriateness of the goals, purposes, and outcomes of the project and how these goals will be achieved to invest in building the assets of the community, and the capacities of the applicant and its low-income partners. Evidence that members of communities with low incomes are engaged in planning and implementing solutions to advance food security in their community.

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<http://www.rd.usda.gov/contact-us/state-offices>. Fax submissions will not be accepted. USDA RD State Offices should be contacted if there are any questions about eligibility or submission requirements. Applicants should contact USDA RD State Offices well in advance of the application deadline to discuss the project and to ask any questions about the application process.

E. Application Review Information

1. **Criteria.** The Agency will only score applications in which the Applicant and project are eligible, which are complete and sufficiently responsive to program requirements, and in which the Agency agrees on the likelihood of financial feasibility for working capital requests. Applications will be scored in accordance with the procedures and criteria specified in 7 CFR 428.042, and with tiered scoring thresholds as specified below. For each criterion, Applicants must show how the project has merit and why it is likely to be successful. The justification for each criterion must be included in the body of the application, including summaries of any feasibility studies, and business and marketing plans. Scoring information must be readily identifiable in the application or it will not be considered as stated in 7 CFR 428.042(a). If Applicants do not address all parts of the criterion, or do not sufficiently communicate relevant project information, the application will score lower. The VAPG is a competitive program and, therefore, scoring will be based on the quality of the Applicant's responses. Simply addressing the criteria will not guarantee higher scores. The total maximum number of points that can be awarded for an application is 100. For this Notice, the total minimum score requirement for consideration for funding is 50 points.

The Agency application toolkit provides additional instructions to help you to respond to the criteria below. (a) *Nature of the proposed venture* (graduated score 0-20 points). For both planning and working capital grants, Applicants must discuss the technological feasibility of the project, as well as operational efficiency, profitability, and overall economic sustainability resulting from the project. Applicants must also demonstrate the potential for expansion of the customer base for the agricultural commodity or value-added product, and the expected increase in revenue returns to the producer-owners providing the majority of the raw agricultural commodity to the project. Working capital Applicants must also provide the potential number of jobs that will result from the project,

along with a justifiable basis for these projections. See the application template for more information. All Applicants must reference and summarize third-party data and other information that specifically supports value-added projects; discuss the value-added process being proposed; identify the potential markets and distribution channels; address the value to be added to the raw commodity through the value-added process; provide the cost and availability of inputs; indicate the Applicant's experience in marketing the proposed or similar product; provide business financial statements; and supply any other relevant information that supports the viability of the project. Working capital Applicants should demonstrate that those outcomes will result from the project and include supportable projections of increase in customer base, for revenue returned to producers, and of jobs resulting from the project in order to receive up to the maximum number of points. Planning grant Applicants should describe the expected results, and the reasons supporting those expectations. Points will be awarded as follows:

(1) 0 points will be awarded if the application does not address the criterion.

(2) 1 to 5 points will be awarded if the application does not address each of the following: technological feasibility, operational efficiency, profitability, and overall economic sustainability.

(3) 6 to 13 points will be awarded if the application addresses technological feasibility, operational efficiency, profitability, and overall economic sustainability, which is supported by third-party information demonstrating a reasonable likelihood of success.

(4) 14 to 22 points will be awarded if the application addresses technological feasibility, operational efficiency, profitability, and overall economic sustainability, which is supported by third-party information demonstrating a high likelihood of success.

(5) 23 to 30 points will be awarded if all criterion components are well addressed, supported by third-party information demonstrating a high likelihood of success.

(6) *Qualifications of project personnel* (graduated score 0 to 20 points).

Applicants must identify all key individuals who will be responsible for managing and completing the proposed tasks in the work plan, including the roles and activities that owners, staff, contractors, consultants or new hires may perform; and show that these individuals have the necessary qualifications and expertise, including those hired to do market or feasibility

analyses, and/or to develop a business operations plan for the value-added venture. Applications must include the qualifications of those individuals responsible for leading or managing the total project (Applicant owners or project managers), as well as those individuals responsible for conducting the various individual tasks in the work plan (such as consultants, contractors, staff or new hires). Applicants must discuss the commitment and the availability of any consultants or other professionals to be hired for the project; especially those who may be consulting on multiple VAPG projects. If staff or consultants have not been selected at the time of application, specific descriptions of the qualifications required for the positions to be filled must be provided. Applications that demonstrate the strong credentials, education, capabilities, experience, and availability of project personnel that will contribute to a high likelihood of project success will receive more points than those that demonstrate less potential for success in those areas. Points will be awarded as follows:

(1) 0 points will be awarded if you do not address the criterion.

(2) 1 to 4 points will be awarded if qualifications and experience of all staff is not addressed and/or if necessary, qualifications of unfilled positions are not provided.

(3) 5 to 9 points will be awarded if all project personnel are identified but do not demonstrate qualifications or experience relevant to the project.

(4) 10 to 14 points will be awarded if all key personnel demonstrate strong credentials and/or experience, and availability indicating a reasonable likelihood of success.

(5) 15 to 20 points will be awarded if all key personnel demonstrate strong, relevant credentials or experience, and availability indicating a high likelihood of project success.

(6) *Commitments and support* (cumulative score 0 to 10 points). Producer, end-user, and third-party commitments will be evaluated under this criterion. Sole proprietors can receive a maximum of 9 points. Multiple producer applications can receive a maximum of 10 points.

(7) *Independent Producer* (Commitments to the project will be evaluated based on the number of named and documented independent producers currently involved in the project. Points will be awarded as follows:

(i) *Sole Proprietor Applicant* (one owner/producer Applicant): 1 point.

(ii) *Multiple Independent Producer Applicant* (Note that in cases where

NOFO/RFA/RFP: Application Format

USDA Dynamic Forms

OR

“Create-your-own” Templates



FARMERS MARKET PROMOTION PROGRAM AND LOCAL FOOD PROMOTION PROGRAM

2024 PROJECT NARRATIVE FORM AND INSTRUCTIONS

NOT For Turnkey Application Projects

This form is mandatory for all Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) and Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) project type applications, EXCEPT for the "Turnkey Marketing and Promotion" and "Turnkey Recruitment and Training" applications. The Turnkey applicants are required to complete their respective Turnkey Project Narrative Form only, available at the program website. Thoroughly review the applicable FMPP or LFPP Request for Applications (RFA) before completing this form. This form must be attached in its original form as a fillable PDF to the application package within Grants.gov

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Must match box 8 of the SF-424.

Organization Name:
Email Address:
Phone Number:
Fax:

Mailing Address

Street:
City: State: Zip:

AUTHORIZED ORGANIZATION REPRESENTATIVE (AOR)

This person is responsible for signing any documentation should the grant be awarded. Must match box 21 of the SF-424.

Name:
Email Address:
Phone Number:
Fax:

5.2.4 PROJECT NARRATIVE

Required. Applicants MUST prepare and submit a project narrative that include the six sections below and clearly describes the objectives and goal, type of activities, applicable outcomes indicators, and fiscal plan and resources information. The Project Narrative must be typed, single-spaced, in an 11-point font, not to exceed thirty (30) 8.5 x 11 pages. The Project Narrative must be submitted as a PDF and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Project Narrative Attachments Form" on the application package. Handwritten applications or applications in MS Word will not be accepted.

Prior to submitting the application to Grants.gov, make sure no tracked changes, mark-up edits, or comments are visible.

The supporting documents in the subsequent sections do not count against the page limit for the Project Narrative.



PREPARING YOUR ORGANIZATION FOR UPCOMING GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

Preparing For New and Recurring Money

Develop Established, “Shovel-Ready” Concepts

*How can you best demonstrate to grantors that
your project is ready and able to utilize federal
money?*

Proof-of-concepts

Implementable models

Sustainability after grant funding

Grants = Investments in your
organization

Partnerships, Partnerships, Partnerships!

How will your organization collaborate with other key players to maximize the impact of grant funding?



Stay Up-To-Date On Grant Opportunities

To be early is to be on-time, to be on time is to be late...



www.grants.gov



[NJ Department of Agriculture Website](#)



[USDA Socials \(LinkedIn is great!\)](#)



[Join my email list ☺](#)

Q&A?

Contact

Njda.grants@ag.nj.gov

