

USDA Farm to School Grant Program FAQs

Updated March 25, 2014

Please refer to the request for applications (RFA) for more detailed information.

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GENERAL

Q: What are the legislative authorities guiding this program?

A: The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 amended Section 18 of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to establish a Farm to School Program in order to assist eligible entities, through grants and technical assistance, in implementing farm to school programs that improve access to local foods in eligible schools.

Q: What is the purpose of the Farm to School Grant Program?

A: The purpose of this program is to improve access to local foods in eligible schools.

Q: How is “local” defined for the Farm to School Grant Program?

A: “Local” is left to each applicant to define. USDA fully expects applicants to have varying definitions of “local” and “regional” as each definition may be specific to individual contexts.

Q: What is the timeline of the Farm to School Grant Program?

A: Here are the important dates:

- February 18, 2014: Request for Applications Released

- April 2, 2014: Conference/Event Letters of Intent due via email (11:59 p.m. Eastern Time)
- April 30, 2014: Planning, Implementation, and Support service proposals due via grants.gov (11:59 p.m. Eastern Time)
- November 2014: Awards Announced and Funds Available (pending the availability of federal funds)

Q: Is more than one type of grant offered?

A: Yes, USDA is soliciting applications for four types of grants:

1. Planning grants are intended for school districts or schools just starting to incorporate farm to school program elements into their operations.
2. Implementation grants are intended for school districts or schools to help scale or further develop existing farm to school initiatives.
3. Support service grants are intended for state and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers, and non-profit entities working with school districts or schools to further develop existing farm to school initiatives and to provide broad reaching support services to farm to school initiatives.
4. Conference/Event grants are intended for state and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers, and non-profit entities to support conferences, trainings, and events intended to strengthen farm to school supply chains or provide technical assistance. USDA expects to distribute approximately \$500,000 in additional program funds to support at least one statewide or regional conference in all seven FNS regions and at least one national conference.

Q: What percentage of awarded grants will be implementation and support service projects and how many will be planning projects?

A: We expect planning grants will represent approximately 25 percent of the total grant funding awarded, while implementation and support service grants are expected to represent 75 percent of the total awards. Based on the number, quality, and diversity of applications, the actual percentages of grant awards may be different than those noted above.

Q: How many Conference/Event grants will be awarded?

A: We expect to fund approximately at least one national conference/event and seven regional or state conferences/events in each of the seven FNS regions.

Q: Can I submit an application for both a planning and an implementation grant, or an implementation and support service, etc?

A: No, only one application per eligible entity is permitted. Applicants must choose between submitting a planning, implementation, or support service grant, and in either case, may only submit one application.

Q: Can I submit a planning, implementation, or support service grant *and* submit a letter of intent for a Conference/Event grant?

A: Yes. The Conference/Event grant is to fund onetime training events, whereas the planning, implementation, and support service grants are intended to support long term farm to school program development.

Q: How many projects can I participate in?

A: An eligible applicant can serve as the lead on only one application. You must choose between submitting a planning grant, implementation grant, or a support service grant, and in both cases, may only submit one application. You may be listed as a collaborator or partner on several applications. There is no upper limit as a partner. You may serve as a lead applicant on one planning, implementation, or support service grant *and* serve as the lead applicant on a conference/event grant.

Q: The RFA indicates we need to travel to one face-to-face meeting. How should we budget for that in our proposal?

A: The location and duration of the meeting is unknown at this time. You should estimate hotel and other per diem expenses for three days for at least one person and preferably not more than two. If you intend to send additional staff other than the project director, include expenses and justification for additional staff. As for airfare expenses, we recommend estimating flight costs for medium-high priced round trip airfare. (For planning purposes, assume you'll travel further than the next state over.) Please note this is not a requirement of the Conference/Event grant.

Q: I cannot attend the webinars. Will they be recorded?

A: Yes, the webinars will be recorded and will be posted online on the USDA Farm to School webpage as they become available.

ELIGIBILITY

Q: Who is eligible to apply?

A: Authorizing legislation specifies the following eligible entities:

- Eligible schools;
- State and local agencies;
- Indian tribal organizations;
- Agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers; and,
- Non-profit entities.

Q: Can you define non-profit entities?

A: Non-profit entities are defined as any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization which: (1) Is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) Is not organized primarily for profit; and (3) Uses its net proceeds to maintain, improve, and/or expand its operations. For this purpose, the term "non-profit organization" excludes colleges and universities; hospitals; state, local, and federally-recognized Indian tribal governments; and those non-profit organizations which are excluded from coverage of this part in accordance with §230.20(c). (2 CFR Part 230.25). For the purposes of this grant program, non-profit entities must have 501(c)(3) status.

Q: Are 501(c)(6) or other types of non-profit organizations defined by the IRS eligible for this grant opportunity?

A: No, not at this time.

Q: Are private schools eligible for farm to school funds?

A: As noted on page 9 of the RFA, K-12 non-profit private schools, charter schools, Indian tribal schools, and others that participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Programs, but are not associated with a school food authority, are eligible to apply for a grant under the Farm to School Grant Program.

Q: We are applying now to participate in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program but don't currently participate. Can we still apply for the grant program since we will be participating next year?

A: No. Part of the application process involves reporting on Free and Reduced Price Meal participation for the school year 2012-2013. Without that data, you cannot apply.

Q: Are state commodity commissions eligible?

A: For the purposes of this RFA, state commodity commissions are considered state agencies and therefore are eligible to apply for a Support Service grant.

Q: Are schools that are considered a Local Education Agency (LEA) eligible?

A: Yes. For the purposes of this grant program, an LEA is considered a local agency, and therefore is eligible to apply for a Support Service grant. Alternatively, an LEA may choose to partner with an eligible school or school district to apply for a Planning or Implementation grant.

Q: Are entities located in the American territories eligible?

A: The U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Guam are eligible to apply, given their participation in the National School Lunch Act. Entities located in Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, and the Freely Associated States (Federate States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, and Republic of Marshall Islands) are ineligible for this funding opportunity because they receive a Nutrition Assistance Program block grant.

Q: Are institutions of higher learning eligible to apply for a grant?

A: Institutions of higher learning can partner with eligible entities such as schools, state and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or non-profit organizations. However, they cannot submit an application as the primary grantee for planning, implementation, or support service grants.

Q: Can a University Extension Service Program apply for a grant?

A: Extension programs located at institutions of higher learning can partner with schools, state and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agriculture producers or non-profit organizations. However, they cannot submit an application as the primary grantee for planning, implementation, or support service grants.

Q: Are community colleges eligible to apply?

A: Community colleges can partner with eligible entities such as schools, state and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or non-profit organizations. However, they cannot submit an application as the primary grantee for planning, implementation, or support service grants.

Q: My institution of higher learning or extension program is considered a non-profit 501.c.3; can I apply as a non-profit?

A: No.

Q: My institution of higher learning or extension program is considered a state or local agency; can I apply as a state or local agency?

A: No.

Q: My hospital foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. Are we eligible to apply as a non-profit entity?

A: Yes.

Q: I don't have my non-profit status yet. I've applied and expect to get it soon. Can I still apply as a non-profit?

A: No, you must be a registered 501.c.3 organization at the time of application.

Q: Can a fiscal agent apply on my behalf?

A: Yes, provided the fiscal agent is an eligible entity, as defined by authorizing legislative language.

Q: The RFA says funds are for K-12 only. Can K-5 or K-8 schools apply?

A: Yes. School districts can apply for the whole district or for select schools within the district.

Q: Are pre-school or head start programs eligible for either the planning or implementation grants?

A: No, at this time, funding is not available for farm to school initiatives focused on pre-K environments or for providers participating exclusively in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). For this RFA, funding is intended only for those projects that will ultimately benefit children in grades K-12 served through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

Q: Are there additional eligibility requirements for implementation and support service grants?

A: In order for your application to be forwarded for review, implementation grant applicants must show evidence of existing community support and engagement via no less than three letters of support.

Q: We have some agricultural and farming activities already in place at our school that we'd like to expand, but we do not call them farm to school, nor have we received farm to school funding before. Are we eligible?

A: Yes, there is no requirement related to what you call your programs.

Q: Can we develop a school garden with farm to school grant funds?

A: Yes. Please refer to Section III of the RFA that describe the intent and priorities of the grant funds and pages 10-17 that describe allowable activities.

Q: I am a current FY 2014 grantee. Can I apply again this year for funds?

A: Current grant recipients are not prohibited from applying for FY 2015 grants, but, given the competitive nature of this funding program and a Congressional mandate to ensure geographic diversity, priority will likely be given to previously unfunded entities.

Q: I was a FY 2013 planning grantee. Can I apply again this year for funds?

A: Yes, FY 2013 planning grantees are encouraged to apply.

Q: I was a FY 2013 implementation grantee. Can I apply again this year for funds?

A: FY 2013 implementation grant recipients are not prohibited from applying for FY 2015 grants, but, given the competitive nature of this funding program and a Congressional mandate to ensure geographic diversity, priority will likely be given to previously unfunded entities.

Q: I'm with a school trying to decide between a planning grant and an implementation grant. Which should I apply for?

A: Planning grants are for SFAs just getting started (or thinking about starting) farm to school programs. Planning grantees participate in a farm to school planning program that includes monthly webinars, a face-to-face conference, and an online communications forum. They spend their year focusing on building a farm to school team, creating a farm to school vision and goals, doing preliminary taste testing and menu audits, exploring local procurement options, starting school gardens, establishing relationships, and getting students, teachers, food service staff, parents, and communities excited about local food and agriculture, and healthy eating. If your SFA hasn't already participated in these activities, becoming a planning grantee is a great way to get the resources and technical assistance needed to design a farm to school program that incorporates best practices from the very start. If your school or district has already done many of these preliminary activities, then an implementation grant is probably more appropriate. Implementation grantees have more flexibility in how they spend their grant period and funds.

Q: Is the Summer Feeding Program an allowable focus for this grant opportunity?

A: Projects must focus on K-12 students in schools participating in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program. A project may include supplemental activities related to the Summer Feeding Program, but only if they complement activities focused on the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program, and if the Summer Feeding Program is provided by a school or school district that serves K-12 students and participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program.

PLANNING GRANTS

Q: What groups are eligible to apply for planning grants?

A: Only K-12 SFA's, non-profit private schools, charter schools, Indian tribal schools, and others that participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Programs are eligible to receive planning grants.

Q: What is the expected funding amount for planning grants?

A: Planning grant amounts are to be a minimum of \$20,000 and shall not exceed \$45,000.

Q: What is the time period for execution of planning grants?

A: All planning grant activities must be completed in one year. Applicants should expect the grant life cycle to include stand up activities, execution, and close out activities (i.e., final financial and program reports, submission of an implementation plan, accounting, etc.). Applicants are expected to plan accordingly in order to achieve project deliverables within the grant period specified.

Q: If we successfully complete the planning process, will we get an Implementation grant in the next round of funding?

A: While you will be encouraged to apply for an Implementation grant upon successful *completion* of a Planning grant, there are no guarantees of additional funding.

Q: Do we have to use USDA’s planning protocols or can we use our own system?

A: You will be required to use USDA’s planning protocols and templates. You may preview one of the templates from FY2013 in Appendix of the RFA.

Q: As an SFA, can I apply with other schools in my area?

A: Yes, in addition to individual submissions, USDA will consider submissions where a USDA investment might impact multiple districts and thus a broader geographic range than any one district might cover. This could take the form of a “multi-district” submission with one lead district that is collaborating with multiple districts to conduct a comprehensive regional or multi-district planning process. In this case, the lead district is the one that submits the proposal.

Q: How might I find others to partner with to submit a “multi-district” application?

A: You might connect with the Farm to School Coordinator in your State Department of Agriculture or Education. For a complete list of farm to school coordinators across the country, see our [map](#).

IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS

Q: What is the expected funding amount for implementation grants?

A: Implementation grant amounts are to be a minimum of \$65,000 and shall not exceed \$100,000.

Q: What groups are eligible to apply for implementation grants?

A: Only K-12 SFA’s, non-profit private schools, charter schools, Indian tribal schools, and others that participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Programs are eligible to receive implementation grants.

Q: What is the time period for execution of implementation grants?

A: Implementation grants are expected to range from 1 – 2 years. Applicants should expect the grant life cycle to include stand up activities, execution, and close out activities (final financial and program reports, accounting, etc.). Applicants are expected to plan accordingly in order to achieve project deliverables within the grant period specified.

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A: Yes, in addition to individual submissions, USDA will consider submissions where a USDA investment might impact multiple districts and thus a broader geographic range than any one district might cover. This could take the form of a “multi-district” submission with one lead district that is collaborating with multiple districts to conduct a comprehensive regional or multi-district implementation process. In this case, the lead district is the one that submits the proposal.

Q: How might I find others to partner with to submit a “multi-district” application?

A: You might connect with the Farm to School Coordinator in your State Department of Agriculture or Education. For a complete list of farm to school coordinators across the country, see our [map](#).

Q: If we apply for an implementation grant, could the non-profits/farmers we work with also apply for a Support Service grant of their own even though they are listed in our application as partners?

A: Yes.

SUPPORT SERVICE GRANTS

Q: What groups are eligible to apply for support service grants?

A: USDA invites grant applications from state and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers, and non-profit entities, as detailed on page 8 of the RFA.

Q: What is the expected funding amount for support service grants?

A: Support Service grant amounts are to be a minimum of \$65,000 and shall not exceed \$100,000.

Q: What is the time period for execution of Support Service grants?

A: Support Service grants are expected to range from 1 – 2 years. Applicants should expect the grant life cycle to include stand up activities, execution, and close out activities (final financial and program reports, accounting, etc.). Applicants are expected to plan accordingly in order to achieve project deliverables within the grant period specified.

Q: Do I have to have a school or school district partner in order to apply?

A: No. Applicants are, however, strongly encouraged to include letters of support from K-12 school partners that participate in the National School Lunch Program or Breakfast Program. This is intended to ensure school districts are vested partners in and/or ready markets for any farm to school activities funded through this solicitation request.

Q: Can my project support schools or school districts that do not participate in the National School Lunch Program or Breakfast Program?

A: At this time, farm to school funds are intended for eligible K-12 schools or school districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program or Breakfast Program.

Q: I am applying to the Support Service grant, but don't know specifically the schools I will be working with. How do I fill out the cover sheet?

A: If you plan to work with multiple districts or to operate a state or region-wide program, check the "Multiple District Partners" box under the "Type of Application" section of the cover sheet. Under the "Free and Reduced Price Meal Participation: Multiple District Partners" section, please provide a brief explanation of how you plan to partner with schools (e.g our project will recruit 16 schools to participate in a statewide farm to school network, or, our project will award sub-grants to three large districts in our state).

Q: As a non-profit applying, do I have to have an audited financial statement?

A: No.

Q: Do support service proposals have to include procurement related activities?

A: In accordance with the overall purpose of the program to improve access to local foods in eligible schools, a strong proposal would address how the proposed project supports or aligns with local procurement efforts in school lunch or breakfast. See page 41 of the RFA for the scoring criteria for support service grants.

Q: My non-profit have never been audited; are we eligible to apply as the lead organization?

A: Grant applicants are not required to have received an audit prior to being selected for a USDA Farm to School Grant. However, under federal audit requirements, Circular A-133, recipient institutions that

expend \$500,000 or more per year in federal funds must have a single or program-specific audit for that year.

CONFERENCE/EVENT GRANTS

Q: What groups are eligible to apply for conference/event grants?

A: Conference/event grants are available to all interested parties, including but not limited to universities, including cooperative extension; non-profit organizations; state and local agencies; Indian tribal organizations; agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers; non-profit entities; and small business or consulting groups.

Q: What is the expected funding amount for conference/event grants?

A: Conference/event grants will be a minimum of \$15,000 and shall not exceed \$50,000. State focused project awards will range from \$15,000 to \$25,000. Regionally / nationally focused project awards will range from \$25,000 to \$50,000. A total of \$500,000 in program funds will be distributed.

Q: What is the time period for execution of conference/event grants?

A: Conference/event grants will be awarded in FY2014 for a one year grant period. Conference/event grant funds must be expended by the end of FY2015 (i.e. September 30, 2015).

Q: How do I apply?

A: Conference/event grant applicants must submit a letter of intent to farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on April 2, 2014.

Q: Can I partner with or subgrant to another entity to execute my conference/event?

A: Yes. Partners essential to the proposed project that may require funding from USDA to participate in the proposed project can be included in applicant budgets as a subgrantee or line item contractor.

Q: Will USDA participate in my conference/event?

A: Conference/event grant recipients are required to make best faith efforts to include USDA FNS Regional Farm to School personnel in the event planning process.

Q: I have executed a conference/event with USDA in the past. Will I receive special consideration?

A: No, however, priority consideration will be given to entities that completed the USDA Local Foods Procurement Trainings in March 2014.

Q: Do conference/event grant applicants need to complete the cover sheet?

A: No.

Q: Do conference/event grant applicants need to complete the required financial forms from grants.gov?

A: The forms on grants.gov are intended for planning, implementation, and support service grant applicants only. Letters of intent for the conference/event grants do not need to include these forms, however, if selected for funding, USDA may ask you to complete the forms and registrations at a later date.

Q: Are CVs or resumes counted towards the 5 page maximum optional attachment?

A: No.

Q: We are required to submit a draft meeting agenda with our proposal. Does the agenda count towards the 3 page letter of intent maximum?

A: No.

MATCHING FUNDS

Q: Are matching funds required?

A: Matching funds are required for planning, implementation, and support service grants. Matching funds are **not** required for conference/event grants. Federal funds may constitute no more than 75 percent of the total project budget. The grant recipient must show evidence of matching support of at least 25 percent of the total budget in the form of cash or in-kind contributions, including facilities, equipment or services provided by state and local governments, non-profit organizations, and private sources as defined in The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act.

For example, if you are requesting \$100,000 (75% of total project budget) in USDA funds, you must provide a match of no less than \$33,333 (25% of total project budget) for a total project budget of \$133,333.

Q: What is an in-kind contribution?

A: In-kind contributions are generally defined, when used as a cost share or match for a grant, as the value of goods or services provided by a third-party for the benefit of the grant program, where no funds transferred hands. These contributions cannot satisfy a cost sharing or matching requirement for this grant program if they are used towards satisfying a match requirement under any other federal grant agreement the applicant is party to.

Q: What is a cash contribution?

A: A cash contribution means the recipient's cash outlay, including the outlay of money contributed to the recipient by non-federal third-parties. Some examples of cash contributions are:

- The salary and fringe benefits of the grantee or third-party employees in proportion to their efforts under a project.
- The grantee's cost to purchase items of equipment to be used under a project.

Q: Do I need to note where the matching funds will come from in my application?

A: The match contributions reflected in the grant proposal submitted must be documented, including the basis for the value determination as well as be allowable, reasonable and allocable.

Q: Do I need all the required matching resources secured prior to issuing the award or submission of application?

A: Yes, in order for us to issue the award, the grantee must meet the requirement of 25% matching by providing information that they have secured the matching funds and providing confirmation that the matching funds will be *available* during the grant period. The match funds do not need to be *in hand* at the time of submission, but they must be confirmed as secured for the project at the time of application. In addition, documentation of match must be maintained for audit or review of the project.

Q: Can I use federal food service funds as a match for this grant program?

A: No.

Q: Are there any types of federal funds I can use as a match for this grant program?

A: No.

Q: I have cash in hand for my project right now. Can it count toward the match since I'll be spending it on the same project I'm proposing to USDA?

A: Yes. Match must be spent during the same time period as the proposed project. Any cash match you expend before the start of the USDA grant period will not count.

Q: If I anticipate receiving funds from other sources in the future (i.e., weeks, months, year,) may I count them as anticipated, or secured, matching costs?

A: Yes. The applicant is responsible for providing a 25% match and information confirming this match at the time of application. Anticipated funds originating from a source other than the applicant's organization must be documented by a formal letter of intent to provide matching funds upon a grant award. The letter of intent should be on official letterhead and signed by a lead official of the organization providing the match. If the match will come from multiple sources, a letter of intent from each match-providing organization should be included in the application.

Similarly, if the applicant intends to use future volunteer hours allocated against the project during the project period, please include a letter of intent from the lead official of the organization providing the volunteer(s).

The total grant budget submitted in the grant application must reflect the requirement of a split of 75% federal and 25% non-federal funds to support the project. If, during the grant period, the 25% match is not met, the grantee's federal funds will be adjusted to ensure the federal grant funds account for only 75% of the total project budget.

Q: Does time spent cultivating relationships with growers, coordinating purchases and developing menu plans count towards an in-kind match?

A: Yes, work performed by staff and volunteers on the farm to school project may be used to satisfy the matching contribution.

Q: Can previous volunteer work hours count towards the in-kind match?

A: No, the matching funds need to be allocated against the project during the project period.

Q: Are land or buildings an allowable source of matching funds?

A: Land and buildings are unallowable costs and therefore an in-kind contribution of the same is unallowable.

Q: Is the use of facilities an allowable source of matching funds? For example, our school would like to host trainings and meetings in our gymnasium. If we waive the rental fee for the meeting space, can this count towards the match?

A: Yes; the use of a facility may be used as a match for this grant project. You may only charge "market rate" for the rent of the facility.

Q: Can I use a la carte sales as a match for my proposal?

A: No, a la carte sales cannot be used as match for the Farm to School Grant Program. In accordance with 7 CFR Part 210.16(a), school food authorities are required to maintain a non-profit food service. Revenues received by the non-profit school food service are to be used for the operation or improvement of such food services and therefore cannot be used as match.

Q: If we as a school district decide to forego an indirect cost rate, could that count towards our match?

A: Indirect costs may be used to satisfy the match component of the grant project. Your organization must have a negotiated indirect cost rate.

FREE/REDUCED PRICE CALCULATIONS AND POINTS

Q: How will high free and reduced-price schools be scored?

A: Projects that serve a high proportion of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals will not be given extra points during the scoring process. Rather, during the selection process, the Selection Official may give priority consideration to projects that serve a high proportion of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals, among other priorities. See page 42, Section C of the RFA.

Q: How will information on the free and reduced-price percentage be collected?

A: In order to ensure compliance with statutory requirements, all planning, implementation, and support service grant applicants must complete the **Free and Reduced Price Meal Participation** section of the Cover Sheet (found on grants.gov). Conference/event grant applicants are not required to complete the Cover Sheet.

Q: We have three districts with three different rates; how will the percentage be calculated?

A: A weighted average will be used.

Q: We're just working with select schools in our district. Do we submit the district average or the average for the schools we're working with?

A: You submit the rate for the schools you are working with.

Q: Our school has a free reduced rate of 27%. Should we even bother applying? Are the grants going to go primarily to those with high free and reduced rates?

A: As previously mentioned, there will be no extra points assigned to projects that serve a high proportion of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals. Proposals will be scored against the criteria set forth in the RFA (Section XII), and the highest scoring applications will be recommended to the Selection Official for funding. The Selection Official may give priority consideration to projects that serve a high proportion of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals, among other priorities. See Page 38, Section C of the RFA.

BUDGET

Q: What can I include in my budget?

A: Budget expenses can include personnel, contractors, equipment and supplies, meeting expenses, travel, and trainings.

Q: Are equipment and supplies allowable expenditures for planning, implementation, and support service grants?

A: Yes, both equipment (i.e., items of personal property having a useful life of more than one year and a cost of \$5,000 or more such as walk-in freezers, coolers, or ovens) and supplies (e.g., knives, cutting boards, and food processors) are allowable expenses for the Implementation grants. Salad bars, seeds, and garden tools are also allowable expenses.

Q: Are equipment and supplies allowable expenditures for conference/event grants?

A: Budget expenses are expected to include, but not be limited to, expenses related to: personnel, contractors, supplies, meeting expenses (e.g. room rental), travel, planning and promotional activities.

Q: Can I use planning, implementation, or support service grant funds to purchase food?

A: Yes, however no more than 10% of the grant funds may be used for food purchases in the grant budget. The ultimate goal of funded projects should be to make local food products available on school menus; however, purchasing local products should not be a primary use of grant funds. Food purchases should be limited to educational purposes, including but not limited to: farm to school sample tables, taste tests, or promotional use. Food costs related to conducting a test run of a new local or regional product are also deemed an appropriate use of funds.

Q: What rate should I use for indirect costs?

A: If available, the current indirect cost rate negotiated with the cognizant federal negotiating agency or state, if you are a school or school district, should be used. Indirect costs may not exceed the negotiated rate. If a negotiated rate is used, the percentage and base should be indicated. If no rate has been established the applicant may indicate "None—will negotiate" and a reasonable dollar amount for indirect costs may be requested, which will be subject to approval by USDA. In the latter case, if a proposal is recommended for funding, an indirect cost rate proposal must be submitted prior to award to support the amount of indirect costs requested. USDA will request an indirect cost rate proposal and provide instructions, as necessary. An applicant may elect not to charge indirect costs and, instead, use all grant funds for direct costs. If indirect costs are not charged, the phrase "None requested" should be used.

Q: What should I include in the budget narrative?

A: You should include a narrative line item description for every allowable cost and show how it supports the project goals. For example, the narrative should describe the positions, related duties, and the percentage of time to be spent on the project, the number of trips and the average cost per trip, the types of supplies to be purchased, the specific equipment to be purchased, contractors tasks, etc.

Q: Do seeds/plants and livestock fall under the food purchases category?

A: No, seeds and livestock are supplies.

Q: Are buildings allowable costs?

A: Land and buildings are not allowable costs.

Q: Is construction an allowable cost?

A: Construction is not an allowable cost. Replacing old equipment in a school cafeteria, along with rewiring and ventilation upgrades, is considered a non-construction project and therefore is an allowable cost. Erecting a building or making substantial changes to the footprint of a building would be considered a construction project and therefore is not an allowable cost. Any structure over \$5000 (includes the building and land) constitutes a construction project, and is unallowable for this grant project.

Q: Is building a greenhouse an allowable cost?

A: Building a temporary or movable structure is an allowable cost. Building a permanent, stationary structure (such as pouring cement, significantly altering the footprint of a building, etc.) is not an allowable cost.

Q: I am applying for the conference/event grant. I would like to offer small travel stipends to my conference/event participants. May I include this in the budget?

A: Yes.

APPLICATION

Q: Will the USDA Farm to School Team review or edit my application/project narrative before I submit my (official) application?

A: No, the Farm to School Team will not review any portion of the grant application prior to the due date, or provide comments about the application during the review and selection processes.

Q: What do I need to include in my grant application?

A: Please refer to pages 21-34 of the request for applications.

Q: Will FNS accept applications submitted after the deadline?

A: No.

Q: How will I know USDA received my application?

A: USDA recommends that you print your grants.gov confirmation for your records as proof of timely delivery. Approximately three weeks after the close of the grant period or letter of intent deadline, USDA will confirm receipt of all proposals via email. If you do not receive an email, please contact USDA via email. (See SECTION XVIII: Agency Contact.)

Q: What happens if I forget to include one of the documents in my Grants.gov application?

A: The only means of making a correction or adding to a grants.gov application is re-submitting a new, complete application prior to the deadline. USDA will review the most recent submitted application from your organization (i.e., if an application is submitted on Friday without a vital attachment, and then resubmit on Saturday with the attachment, USDA will only review the Saturday submission).

Q: Why do you need resumes or Vitae of senior personnel?

A: To ensure that the project directors and other key personnel are qualified to carry out the objectives of the project.

Q: Can I mail my application?

A: No, only planning, implementation, and support service applications submitted via grants.gov will be accepted. Letters of intent for conference/event grants may be emailed only.

Q: May I email my letter of intent in piecemeal emails?

A: USDA strongly encourages applicants to keep file sizes to a minimum and only submit one email with your letter of intent attached.

Q: Is there an application checklist?

A: Yes, please see page 47 of the request for applications.

Q: How should the letters of support be addressed?

A: All letters of support may be addressed to Greg Walton, Grant Officer. All letters should be included in your application package; e-mailed or postal mailed letters separately will not be accepted.

Q: How do I know if I am subject to Executive Order (EO) 12372?

A: Your EO 12372 status is determined by your state. Visit this link to see if your state participates in the intergovernmental review process: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc.

LETTER OF INTENT

Q: Do I have to submit a letter of intent if I am applying for a planning, implementation, or support service grant?

A: No. Letters of intent are only required for conference/event grants.

REVIEW OF APPLICATION AND AWARD

Q: What happens after I submit my application?

A: USDA will conduct an initial screening of all applications to ensure they are eligible and fully responsive.

Eligible and responsive applications are those that meet the following requirements:

1. Submitted by eligible applicants (see Section IV: Eligibility Requirements);
2. Meet all other eligibility requirements (see Section IV: Eligibility Requirements);
3. Submitted on or before the required deadline (see Section VII: Important Dates and Award Periods);
4. Include at least a 25 percent match of the total project cost;
5. Are complete (see Section IX: Grant Application: What to Include); and,
6. Are in the required format (see Section X, Application Format).

If an application does not include all appropriate information, USDA will consider the application to be non-responsive and will eliminate it from further evaluation.

Q: When will I be notified of the status after I submit the application?

A: Awards are expected to be made in early FY 2015, or on or after October 1, 2014. In the two previous funding cycles, awards were made in November and projects began in December.

Q: How will my application be reviewed?

A: After initial screening, USDA will convene an evaluation panel to consider the merit of each grant application deemed complete and responsive to the RFA components. Each application that passes initial screening will be given to the panel to be evaluated and scored according to how well it addresses each application component. The panel will assign each application a score using the evaluation criteria and weights specified in the RFA for each evaluation component. Please see Section XII of the RFA for details on how applications will be evaluated.

Q: How will applications be selected for funding?

A: A list of all applications deemed eligible for award will be submitted to the Selection Official for a final decision regarding funding. The Selection Official has ultimate authority to decide which applications are approved and funded, and generally will adhere to the recommendations made by the reviewers, provided that funding is available. However, the Selection Official reserves the right to deviate from those recommendations. The Selection Official may take other factors, including Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) and USDA priorities, into account when granting awards and/or not awarding a particular award.

Q: Will my application be funded at the amount requested?

A: As part of the technical review process, USDA will review applicants' budgets to ensure that all costs are reasonable, allowable and applicable. Applications selected and approved for funding with budgets that are realistic, well justified, and supported will likely be funded at the requested amounts. However, USDA reserves the right to fund applications out of rank order to achieve priorities identified earlier; or at lesser amounts if USDA determines that the project can be implemented with less funding; or at lesser amounts if federal funding is not sufficient to fully fund all applications that merit awards. This is subject to availability of funds.

Q: Will applications be reviewed on a regional level or will they be reviewed at a state level?

A: Applications will be reviewed on a national level, and we will seek to ensure geographical diversity and equitable treatment of urban, rural, and tribal communities.

Q: What type of financial and progress reporting is required by awardees?

A: Planning grant awardees will submit a mid-term financial report and a final financial report. Implementation grant and support service grant awardees will submit financial reports on a quarterly basis throughout the grant term and a final financial report. See page 44, Section D. of the request for applications for more information.

Planning grant awardees will submit a mid-term progress report and a final report. Implementation grant and support service grant awardees will submit progress reports on a quarterly basis throughout the grant term and a final report. The award document will indicate the reporting formal and schedule for submitting project performance/progress reports to USDA. See page 44, Section E. of the request for applications for more information.

Q: Will grant funds be provided to awardees as a lump sum, or will they be reimbursed?

A: USDA expects to make funds available to the grantee in advance of need. See page 10, Section V. of the request for applications for more information.

GRANTS.GOV

Q: If I have problems with grants.gov, will USDA staff help me submit or accept my application package after the deadline?

A: No, USDA will not provide applicants technical assistance with the grants.gov system. The grants.gov technical support center can be reached at 800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov. There will be a grants.gov webinar conducted for all applicants to learn more about the application process. Please check our [website](#) and [sign up](#) for our E-letter in order to receive information regarding the date of this webinar.

Q: Where can I get more help if I still have questions about the Farm to School Program or application?

A: The USDA Farm to School Team strongly recommends that you read the Farm to School Grant RFA before submitting questions. If you still have questions after reading the RFA, you can forward your question to: farmtoschool@fns.usda.gov