

Regional Food System Partnerships

Fiscal Year 2020 Request for Applications, Version 4 (updated April 30, 2020)[1]

Application deadline was extended from May 11, 2020 to May 26, 2020

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-20-0009

Publication Date: March 9, 2020

Application Due Date: 11:59 PM Eastern Time on May 26, 2020

[1] On March 18, 2020, **Private Corporations** was added to Section 3.3 – Eligible Partners. On March 25, 2020, the application deadline was extended from May 11, 2020 to May 26, 2020. On April 30, 2020, clarifying language on using indirect costs for cost sharing or matching was added to Section 3.4 – Cost Sharing and Section 4.6.2 – Using Indirect Costs For Cost Sharing or Matching.

Program Solicitation Information

Funding Opportunity Title: Regional Food System Partnerships

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-20-0009

Announcement Type: Initial

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.177

Dates: Applications must be received on or before 11:59 pm Eastern Time on May 26, 2020, through Grants.gov. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

Executive Summary: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), requests applications for the fiscal year (FY) 2020 Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) grant program. AMS will competitively award grants to eligible applicants for projects that support partnerships to plan and develop local or regional food systems.

It is anticipated that approximately $10 million will be available to fund applications under this solicitation. The final amount available is subject to Congressional action.

RFSP is implemented through two project types: *Planning and Design*, the awards for which range from $100,000 to $250,000, and *Implementation and Expansion*, the awards for which range from $250,000 to $1,000,000. A 25 percent cash match of total Federal funds is required.

This announcement provides information about eligibility criteria for applicants and projects, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an award.

Stakeholder Input: AMS seeks comments about this Request for Applications (RFA). We will consider the comments in developing the next RFA for the program. Email written stakeholder comments within one year of the publication date of this RFA to: AMSGrants@usda.gov. (This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this RFA and not requesting information or forms.) In your comments, please state that you are commenting on the **Regional Food System Partnerships RFA**.

Application Checklist

This application checklist provides the required and conditionally required documents for an application package. AMS expects applicants to read the entire RFA prior to submitting their application to ensure that they understand the program's requirements.

RFSP requires that **all application packages** include the following:

- ☐ SF-424 – Application for Federal Assistance (in Grants.gov)

The following required application components must be combined into one PDF in the order listed below.

- ☐ Project Narrative Form (including Fiscal Plan and Resources and Personnel Qualifications)
- ☐ Signed Letter(s) Verifying Matching Funds for EACH Cash or In-kind Resource
- ☐ Signed Letter(s) of Commitment from Each Partner at the time of application

If applicable, packages may also be required to include the following documents:

- ☐ Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) (PDF Attachment)

Timing to Obtain or Submit Grants.gov Required Elements

Required Action	*Timing to Obtain/Submit*
AMS Deadline to receive final application and all supporting materials through Grants.Gov.	*May 26, 2020 – 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time*
Obtaining Your Organization's DUNS Number (if you do not already have one)	1-2 business days
Establishing an *Active* SAM.gov Account (if you do not already have one)	7-10 business days
Obtaining a TIN/EIN (if you do not already have one)	Up to 2 weeks
Creating your Grants.gov profile and registering your Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) authorization	Up to 2 weeks

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 Funding Opportunity Description 5
1.1 Legislative Authority 5
1.2 Purpose 5
1.3 Project Types 6
2.0 Award Information 8
2.1 Type of Federal Assistance 8
2.2 Type of Applications 8
2.3 Available Funding 8
2.4 Federal Award Period Duration and Size 9
3.0 Eligibility Information 9
3.1 Eligible Applicants - Partnerships 9
3.2 Eligible Entities 9
3.3 Eligible Partners 11
3.4 Cost Sharing and Matching 11
4.0 Application and Submission Information 12
4.1 Electronic Application Package 12
4.2 Content and Form of Application Submission 12
4.3 Submitted Application Qualification 15
4.4 Submission Date and Time 15
4.5 Intergovernmental Review 15
4.6 Funding Restrictions 15
4.7 Grants.gov Application Submission and Receipt Procedures and Requirements 17
5.0 Application Review Information 20
5.1 Project Evaluation Criteria 20
5.2 Review and Selection Process 22
6.0 Award Administration Information 22
6.1 Award Notices 22
6.2 Unsuccessful Applicants 22
6.3 Administrative and National Policy Requirements 22
6.4 Reporting Requirements 23
7.0 Agency Contacts 23
7.1 Lead Grants Management Specialist 23
7.2 Grants Management Specialists 23
7.3 Address 23
7.4 Grants.gov Questions 23
8.0 Other Information 23
8.1 Definitions 23
8.2 Equal Opportunity Statement 24
8.3 Freedom Of Information Act Requests 24
8.4 Paperwork Reduction 25

1.0 FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

1.1 LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) is authorized by subtitle A of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (7 U.S.C. § 1621 et seq.) as amended under section 10102 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, Public Law 115-334. LAMP supports the development, coordination, and expansion of direct producer-to-consumer marketing; local and regional food markets and enterprises; and value-added agricultural products. The primary goals of LAMP are to:

- Connect and cultivate regional food economies through public-private partnerships;
- Support the development of business plans, feasibility studies, and strategies for value-added agricultural production and local and regional food system infrastructure;
- Strengthen capacity and regional food system development through community collaboration and expansion of mid-tier value chains;
- Improve income and economic opportunities for producers and food businesses through job creation; and
- Simplify the application processes and the reporting processes for the Program.

The Regional Food System Partnerships Program (RFSP), Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP), and Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG) Program are implemented under LAMP. RFSP and FMLFPP are administered by AMS and VAPG is administered by the Rural Business-Cooperative Service under Rural Development. This RFA is for RFSP.

1.2 PURPOSE

The RFSP supports partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems. The RFSP focuses on building and strengthening local or regional food economy viability and resilience by alleviating unnecessary administrative and technical barriers for participating partners.

Partnerships will be responsible for:

- Determining the size and scope of the local or regional food system in which the project's goals, outreach objectives, and eligible activities are to be carried out;
- Coordinating with AMS to receive and provide technical assistance; and
- Conducting outreach and education for potential participation in the partnership agreement and eligible activities.

Applicants will work with their partners to catalyze the development of local or regional food systems. Applicants will coordinate efforts within the partnership to set priorities, connect resources and services, and measure progress towards common goals.

Partnerships must bring a variety of financial and technical capabilities, demonstrate experience or readiness to work effectively and collaboratively with public and private entities across sectors, and present innovative, sustainable, and measurable approaches to achieving the project's goals.

RFSP grant recipients may apply for other LAMP programs on behalf of producers or eligible entities that desire to participate in eligible activities under the partnership agreement.

1.3 PROJECT TYPES

RFSP offers **Planning and Design** and **Implementation and Expansion** project types.

1.3.1 PLANNING AND DESIGN PROJECTS

Planning and Design projects support partnerships in the early stages of convening, envisioning, and planning processes for developing local or regional food systems. Through these processes, partnerships can determine the goals, outreach, objectives, and eligible activities to be carried out in the regional food system, including defining the region's parameters (economic, geographic, etc.). Specifically, these projects support a food system's capacity to develop and build community connections (public and private) that allow a region to engage in activities that drive the discovery and promotion of collaboration opportunities within the food system. Emphasis is placed on inclusively seeking public and private collaborators that connect and cultivate regional food economies and diverse non-Federal financial and technical resources. Examples of eligible project activities for these partnerships include but are not limited to:

- Convening established and potential partners, such as current or past FMLFPP or VAPG grantees, to define the regional food system scope and structure, share opportunities and challenges, and develop an approach that is inclusive of any potential members of a regional food system;
- Creating and conducting feasibility studies, implementation plans, and assessments, including studies analyzing capital needs and gaps;
- Conducting research on specific market, mid-tier value chain, or infrastructure investments or policy analysis to prioritize next steps at the local, regional, state, and tribal government level;
- Connecting food value chain entities with partners and funders to engage in activities that strengthen the regional food system, such as providing technical assistance to food system enterprises seeking capital investments or initiating and monitoring projects associated with other LAMP programs;
- Researching possible metrics to measure and evaluate the partnership's early development work and identify ways to use and improve them to establish time-defined performance benchmarks for achieving partnership goals.

1.3.2 IMPLEMENTATION AND EXPANSION PROJECTS

Implementation and Expansion projects support partnerships building on prior or ongoing efforts within a local or regional food system. Partnerships funded in this track will have already completed most or all the activities discussed above for Planning and Design projects. Applicants should describe how the goals, objectives, and activities in their proposal build on and/or align with previous efforts, clearly

engage entities with a shared commitment to the regional food system and maintain a diverse public-private network that enhances food system development. Examples of eligible project activities for these partnerships include but are not limited to:

- Prioritizing strategies to fill food systems gaps, meet stakeholder needs, and facilitate market opportunities and food access solutions;
- Institutionalizing processes for ongoing community and business engagement to ensure sustainable approaches meet regional needs and provide a forum for ideas, concerns, and updates;
- Conducting research on specific market, mid-tier value chain, or infrastructure investments or policy analysis to prioritize next steps at the local, regional, state, and tribal government level;
- Supporting food system efforts to analyze capital needs and gaps;
- Connecting eligible entities and partners to meet identified needs in transporting local agricultural products to market;
- Creating innovative value chains in which producers, manufacturers, buyers, and other related actors form collaborative, transparent partnerships with a commitment to shared operational values and social mission goals;
- Increasing stakeholder awareness of regulatory considerations and market channel requirements that may impede the ability of food value chains to access certain channels and assisting producers in navigating such systems;
- Identifying resources for food system enterprises, providing technical assistance for partnership activities such as fiscal sponsorship, and applying for programs and resources that align with regional food system efforts, including other LAMP programs or those seeking capital investments;
- Evaluating the partnership's expansion work and establishing time-defined performance measures for achieving partnership goals.

1.3.3 PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING

All AMS awards are subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in the AMS General Terms and Conditions. Applicants that have questions concerning the allowability of costs after reviewing the Terms and Conditions should contact AMS staff using the contact information listed under ***7.0 Agency Contacts***.

RFSP is intended to fund the partnership functions and to build capacity for decision making, coordination efforts, obtaining additional resources, and planning direction and needed activities. The partnership or its member entities must identify and utilize other resources to cover costs of implementation where such other resources exist. Activities that can be funded under this grant because they are not commonly funded under other USDA programs might include but are not limited to value chain coordination, convening multiple types of partners and stakeholders for strategic planning, grant-writing, and program exploration on behalf of partners and entities.

AMS recognizes that businesses may source or market some of their food products outside of the defined locality or region. These businesses may participate in RFSP projects as long as they meet the eligibility requirements (see section ***3.0***), but award recipients may use Federal award funds only to

build a business' capacity to develop, improve, and/or expand local or regional supply chain activities, and not to support supply chain activities for food items originating from or being sold to areas outside the defined locality or region.

Projects are not eligible for funding if the proposed activities:

- Are for production-related expenses, including the purchase of farm equipment, tools, materials, supplies, and other related costs.
- Are related to construction or purchasing land for use by a non-Federal entity.
- Benefit only one agricultural producer or individual.
- Depend upon the completion of another project or the receipt of another grant.
- Duplicate activities in a project that has received a Federal award from another Federal award program.
- Provide capital for revolving loan funds or seed equity funds.

1.3.4 PRIORITY CONSIDERATION

AMS will prioritize applications that:

- Leverage significant non-Federal financial and technical resources **and** coordinate with other local, State, Tribal, or national efforts. While in-kind contributions do not count toward the 25 percent RFSP match requirement, any match resources included in the proposal above and beyond the 25 percent cash match may lend support to the proposal.
- Cover an area that includes communities with areas of concentrated poverty that provide significant opportunities for high impact investment; or
- Have a diverse set of relevant project partners, although such partners need not be based in the partnership's defined region.

AMS will review and apply priority consideration, based on applicant narrative responses, during its administrative review process (see section ***5.2***).

2.0 AWARD INFORMATION

2.1 TYPE OF FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

AMS will use a Grant Agreement to provide a Federal award to successful applicants.

2.2 TYPE OF APPLICATIONS

New application. All new applications will be reviewed competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in section ***5.0 Application Review Information***.

2.3 AVAILABLE FUNDING

It is anticipated that approximately $10 million will be available to fund applications in FY 2020. Any funds not awarded under this RFA will be applied to the RFA for the next competitive award cycle.

Enactment of additional continuing resolutions or an appropriations act may affect the availability or level of funding for this program.

2.4 FEDERAL AWARD PERIOD DURATION AND SIZE

AMS expects applicants to complete their projects within the required timeframe. It is acceptable to complete a project before the scheduled performance period end date. However, AMS encourages applicants to take the full grant period to allow ample time to complete projects. The applicant must indicate the start date and end date on Block 17 of the SF-424 "Application for Federal Assistance".

Award size varies by project type. Applicants may not request less than or more than the respective minimum/maximum amounts. Applicants must justify the requested funding amounts within the respective narrative and work plan sections of the proposal.

Project Type	Duration (Months)	Start Date	Completion Date	Minimum Award	Maximum Award
Planning & Design	24	September 30, 2020	September 29, 2022	$100,000	$250,000
Implementation & Expansion	36	September 30, 2020	September 29, 2023	$250,000	$1,000,000

3.0 ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

3.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS - PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are eligible to apply to RFSP. A partnership is an agreement between one or more eligible entities (see section ***3.2***) and one or more eligible partners (see section ***3.3***).

An application may be submitted by an eligible entity or an eligible partner on behalf of the partnership. The partnership must specify in its application which organization(s) in the partnership are responsible for receiving and managing the award.

Partnerships that include Limited Resource Entities are strongly encouraged to apply.

All applicants must be domestic entities owned, operated, and located within the 50 United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or Tribal Governments.

3.2 ELIGIBLE ENTITIES

Eligible entities include:

Entity Type	Description
Producer	An owner-operator or tenant that produces a crop or handles livestock and is entitled to a share of the farm income.

Entity Type	Description
Farmer or Rancher Cooperative	A business or service organization (1) that is owned and democratically controlled by the people who use its services and (2) whose benefits (services received and earnings allocations) are distributed to the user-owners based on how much they use the cooperative.
Producer Network or Association	Producer group- or member-owned organizations or businesses that provide, offer, or sell agricultural products or services through a common distribution system for the mutual member benefit of the owners, as well as organizations or other businesses that assist, represent, or serve producers or producer networks.
Majority-Controlled Producer-Based Business Venture	A venture with greater than 50 percent of the ownership and control held by one or more producers or one or more entities that are wholly owned and controlled by one or more producers. Entities described here include legal partnerships, limited liability corporations, limited liability partnerships, and corporations.
Food Council	Food policy council or food and farm system network that represents multiple organizations involved in the production, processing, and consumption of food, and local, Tribal, and State governments.
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Network or Association	Formal groups of farms that work collectively to offer consumers regular (usually weekly) deliveries of locally-grown farm products during one or more harvest season(s), often on a subscription or membership basis. This includes organizations or other businesses that assist, serve, or represent CSAs or CSA networks.
Local Governments	Any unit of government within a state, including a county; borough; municipality; city; town; township; parish; local public authority, including any public housing agency under the United States Housing Act of 1937, or public transportation agency; special district; school district; intrastate district; council of governments, whether or not incorporated as a nonprofit corporation under State law; and any other agency or instrumentality of a multi-, regional, intra-state, or local government.
Nonprofit Corporations	Any organization or institution, including nonprofits with State or IRS 501 (c) status and accredited institutions of higher education, where no part of the organization's or institution's net earnings inure to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.

Entity Type	Description
Public Benefit Corporations	Corporations organized to construct or operate a public improvement, the profits from which inure to the benefit of one or more State or to the people therein.
Economic Development Corporations	Organizations whose missions are to improve, maintain, develop, and/or market or promote a specific geographic area.
Regional Farmers Market Authorities	Entities that establish and enforce State, regional, or county policies and jurisdiction over State, regional, or county farmers markets. State agencies are eligible if their State's regulatory statutes identify the specific State agency as a regional farmers market authority.
Tribal Governments	Governing bodies or governmental agencies of any Indian tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community (including any native village as defined in Section 3 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, 85 Stat. 688 (43 U.S.C. § 1602)) certified by the Secretary of the Interior as eligible for the special programs and services provided through the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

3.3 ELIGIBLE PARTNERS

Eligible partners include:

Entity Type	Description
State Agencies or Regional Authorities	Planning commissions, councils of governments, regional economic development organizations/districts, and similar organizations.
Philanthropic Corporations	Organizations that meet the definition of 2 CFR § 200.70.
Private Corporations	A company that is owned by one person or a small group of people, for example a family, and whose shares are available only to specific individuals and are not traded on a stock market.
Institutions of Higher Education	Educational institutions that meet the requirements specified at 20 U.S.C. § 1001.
Commercial, Federal or Farm Credit System Lending Institutions	An accredited financial organization such as a bank, credit union, or finance company that makes agriculture loans and may or may not also be a depository institution.

3.4 COST SHARING AND MATCHING

This funding opportunity requires a 25 percent match of the total amount of the Federal portion of the grant in the form of non-Federal **cash** resources. In-kind contributions such as indirect costs or the

calculated value of staff time or donated space, while encouraged, do not count toward the fulfillment of this requirement.

Cost sharing for the required cash match must be in the form of allowable direct costs. Refer to 2 CFR § 200.306 for additional Federal requirements and definitions, including the basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions.

All matching contributions **must be committed or secured** at the time an applicant is recommended for an award. Applicants must submit a signed letter(s) with the application, which serves as the verification for each cash and in-kind matching contribution (see *section **4.2.3***). An award will not be issued unless all matching funds over the life of the grant are secured. Additional anticipated matching funds not in place by the time the project commences cannot be counted toward the matching requirement.

Applicants must indicate the total match amount and how it will specifically align with their requested funding when completing the Fiscal Plan section of the RFSP Project Narrative (see section ***4.2.2***) and submit letters or other documentation verifying the match for EACH cash and in-kind resource (see section ***4.2.3***).

Indirect costs may count toward the in-kind match (see section ***4.6.2***).

Applicants may not use program income (as defined in 2 CFR § 200.80) or Federal funds of any kind as a match or cost share.

4.0 APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

4.1 ELECTRONIC APPLICATION PACKAGE

Only electronic applications may be submitted via Grants.gov in response to this RFA. We urge applicants to submit early to the Grants.gov system. For an overview of the Grants.gov application process see Grants.gov's Apply for Grants webpage. This RFA contains the information needed to obtain and complete required application forms and AMS-specific attachments. More information about applying through Grants.gov can be found in section ***4.7 Grants.gov Application Submission and Receipt Procedures and Requirements***.

4.2 CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION

4.2.1 SF-424 APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

Required: Form SF-424 is available via the opportunity at Grants.gov. Most information blocks on the required form are either self-explanatory or adequately explained in the instructions. However, applicants must use the following supplemental instructions associated with specific blocks on the SF-424.

Block	Instructions
#1 Type of Submission	Application
#2 Type of Application	New
#4 through #7	Not required

Block	Instructions
#8c Organizational DUNS	Applicant DUNS# for the organization submitting the application. See D&B Request a DUNS Number
#8d Address	Enter the organization street address as it appears in SAM.gov. P.O. Boxes will not be accepted. Enter a 9-digit zip code.
#10 Name of Federal Agency	AMS, USDA
#11 Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number	10.177
#12 Funding Opportunity Number	USDA-AMS-TM-RFSP-G-20-0009
#13 Competition Identification Number	Not applicable
#14 Areas Affected by Project	Enter cities, counties, States affected by project.
#15 Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project	Provide a short description of the project.
#16a Congressional Districts for Applicant	Enter the Congressional district where your main office is located.
#16b Congressional Districts for Program/Project	Enter the Congressional district where your project will be implemented. Write "All" if the project will be implemented in more than one location.
#17 Proposed Project Start Date and End Date	Start Date: September 30, 2020. End date: Enter the appropriate End Date for your project type.
#18a Estimated Funding - Federal	Total Federal amount requested.
#18b – 18f Estimated Funding – Applicant	Enter the amount of match or cost share from the applicant organization and/or other partners.
#19 Is Applicant Subject to Review by State Under Executive Order 12372 Process?	See section ***4.5 Intergovernmental Review***.

4.2.2 PROJECT NARRATIVE

Required. Applicants are required to prepare and submit a narrative using the RFSP Project Narrative form. The form and instructions are available on the program's webpage. In general, the narrative will describe the project's partners, actual or potential definition of "region", objectives and goals, types and sequence of project activities, monitoring and evaluation strategies associated with the proposed activities, and how the applicant will manage the project.

The narrative must be submitted as a PDF and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Add Attachments" button under SF-424 item #15.

Handwritten applications or applications in MS Word will not be accepted. The narrative must be typed, single-spaced, in an 11-point font, not to exceed fifteen (15) 8.5 x 11 pages, excluding existing form content. For example, if the form is 15 pages before you begin entering your project information, your narrative may be up to 30 pages (15 original pages + 15 pages of applicant content). DO NOT modify the margins of the Project Narrative form.

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

The supporting documents listed below do not count toward the 15-page limit.

4.2.3 MATCHING FUNDS AND LETTERS OF VERIFICATION

Required: Each application is required to have written verification of match commitment from any party, including the applicant, who will contribute cash or in-kind matching non-Federal resources to the project.

Submit one letter verifying the match for EACH cash or in-kind resource, signed by the matching organization.

AMS has posted **A SUGGESTED MATCH VERIFICATION TEMPLATE LETTER** on the grant program's application website. We highly encourage you to use this template. If you do not use this template, your match verification document must minimally include the following:

- Project Applicant
- Project Title
- Cash Commitment per year (if applicable) and Total Cash Match
- In-kind Contribution per year (if applicable) and Total In-kind Match. Break down items into categories as applicable:
    - Salaries (employee name, title, duties, pay rate/hour, amount matched per year)
    - Items/Activities (fair market value per unit, how value determined, and amount matched per year)
- Explanation of how each type of match will correspond to the budget or be used by the Applicant.
- Signature of Matching Organization Representative with typed name and title.

Submit *Matching Fund and Letters of Verification* on letterhead and address them to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top of the documents that they are **MATCH VERIFICATION LETTERS**. Letters must accompany the proposal at the time of application. Unsigned letters will not be accepted.

4.2.4 LETTERS OF COMMITMENT FROM PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Required: Applicants must provide letters of commitment (not support) from all project partners at the time of application. More information can be found on partners in section ***3.3 Eligible Partners***.

AMS has posted a **PARTNER ORGANIZATION TEMPLATE** on the grant program's application website. We highly encourage you to use this template. If you do not use this template, the Letters of Commitment must include at least the following information:

- Project Applicant;
- Project Title;
- A short introduction describing the partner entity's mission and its reason(s) for joining the partnership;
- The specific role(s) the entity is committing to for the project, including the participation of specific individuals, as applicable; and

- A statement that these individuals and the entity agree to abide by the management plan contained in the application.

Submit *Letters of Commitment* on letterhead and address them to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top that they are **LETTERS OF COMMITMENT**. Letters must accompany the proposal at the time of application. Unsigned letters or letters emailed separately will not be accepted.

Letter(s) must be attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Add Attachments" button under SF-424 item #15.

PLEASE NOTE: RFSP does not require Congressional letters of support and such letters do not carry additional weight during the evaluation process.

4.2.5 NEGOTIATED INDIRECT COST RATE AGREEMENT (NICRA)

Required if the applicant has a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA). Refer to section ***4.6.1 Indirect Costs*** for more information. The NICRA must be in PDF format and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the "Add Attachments" button under SF-424 item #15.

4.3 SUBMITTED APPLICATION QUALIFICATION

Your application will **not be accepted** if it:

- Is received by Grants.gov after the submission deadline (see AMS' Policy on Late Applications); or
- Is submitted via any method other than through Grants.gov.

Your application will be **rejected** if it:

- Is non-responsive to the requirements of this RFA (see AMS' Policy on Non-Responsive Applications).

4.4 SUBMISSION DATE AND TIME

Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov. Ensure that all components of the application are complete before submission. Allow enough time for the application process, as it may take more than one attempt before your application is successfully submitted. AMS encourages you to submit your application at least two weeks prior to the application deadline to ensure all certifications and registrations are met.

Only applications submitted and validated by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on May 26, 2020, to Grants.gov will be accepted. See AMS' Policy on Late Applications.

4.5 INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW

This program is not subject to Executive Order 12372, which requires intergovernmental consultation with state and local officials.

4.6 FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

4.6.1 INDIRECT COSTS

Indirect costs (also known as "facilities and administrative costs"—defined at 2 CFR § 200.56) are those costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.

As stated in the regulations (2 CFR §§ 200.413 and 414), any non-Federal entity that has never received a negotiated indirect cost rate, except State and Local Government and Indian Tribe Indirect Cost Proposals, may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC) that may be used indefinitely. As described in 2 CFR § 200.403, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a recipient chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the recipient may apply to do at any time.

All applicants who elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent must use the MTDC as the base. MTDC are defined in 2 CFR § 200.68 as all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first $25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDCs exclude equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs, and the portion of each subaward in excess of $25,000. Other items may be excluded only when necessary to avoid a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs.

If an applicant has a negotiated indirect cost rate approved by its cognizant agency, the applicant must submit a copy of its approved NICRA with its application. Entities that would like to negotiate an indirect cost rate must contact their cognizant agency. For assignments of cognizant agencies, see 2 CFR § 200.19.

4.6.2 USING INDIRECT COSTS FOR COST SHARING OR MATCHING

The maximum amount of indirect costs allowed for a project may be included under the Federal portion of the budget or, alternatively, may be offered as an in-kind matching contribution if no indirect costs are requested on the Federal portion of the budget.

The applicant may split the indirect cost allocation between the Federal and non-Federal portions of the budget only if the total amount of indirect costs does not exceed the maximum indirect costs allowed. Alternatively, the recipient may request any other combination that, when combined, does not exceed the maximum indirect costs allowable. Refer to 2 CFR §§ 200.413 and 200.414 for additional information on determining if costs charged to the award are direct or indirect.

4.6.3 SUBAWARD RESTRICTION

The recipient is expected to perform a majority of the work of the project and may use sub-awarding and/or sub-contracting methods with eligible partners via its partnership agreement to do so for the purposes of the proposed project.

Using Federal grant funds to competitively "re-grant" funds in mini-grant programs, or for activities that are not central to the purpose of the project or unknown costs, is unallowable. However, the recipient

may utilize its match to offer mini-grants if so desired, as long as they further the project's purposes and comply with Federal match requirements at 2 CFR § 200.306. If the recipient chooses to offer project mini-grants with non-Federal funds that do not comply with these regulations, he or she may not include those funds as part of their matching requirement for this grant. For more information, refer to Section ***3.4***.

4.7 GRANTS.GOV APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS

4.7.1 HOW TO REGISTER TO APPLY THROUGH GRANTS.GOV

The registration process can take **up to four weeks** to complete. Therefore, complete your registration allowing enough time to ensure it does not impact your ability to meet required application submission deadlines.

If individual applicants are eligible to apply for this grant funding opportunity, refer to:
https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration.html

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:
https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html

1) *Obtain a DUNS Number*: All entities applying for funding, including renewal funding, must have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number from Dun & Bradstreet (D&B). Applicants must enter the DUNS number in the data entry field labeled "Organizational DUNS" on the SF-424 form.

2) *Register with SAM*: In addition to having a DUNS number, organizations applying online through Grants.gov must register with the System for Award Management (SAM). All organizations must register with SAM to apply online. Failure to register with SAM will prevent your organization from applying through Grants.gov. **SAM.gov accounts must be updated annually, and your organization must have an *active* SAM.gov account to submit your application to Grants.gov.**

3) *Create a Grants.gov Account*: The next step in the registration process is to create an account with Grants.gov. Applicants must know their organization's DUNS number to complete this process. Completing this process automatically triggers an email request for applicant roles to the organization's E-Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC) for review. The EBiz POC is a representative from your organization who is the contact listed for SAM. To apply for grants on behalf of your organization, you will need the Authorized Organization Role (AOR).

4) *Authorize Grants.gov Roles*: After creating an account on Grants.gov, the EBiz POC receives an email notifying him or her of your registration and request for roles. The EBiz POC will then log in to Grants.gov and authorize the appropriate roles, including the AOR role, thereby giving you permission to complete and submit applications on behalf of the organization. You will be able to submit your application online any time after you have been approved as an AOR.

5) *Track Role Status*: After registering with Grants.gov and authorizing the applicant AOR, Grants.gov allows you to track your status.

6) *Electronic Signature*: When applications are submitted through Grants.gov, the name of the organization's AOR who submitted the application is inserted into the signature line of the application, serving as the electronic signature. The EBiz POC **must** authorize individuals who are able to make legally binding commitments on behalf of the organization to act as an AOR; **this step is often missed, and it is crucial for valid and timely submissions.**

4.7.2 HOW TO SUBMIT AN APPLICATION TO AMS VIA GRANTS.GOV

Applicants may use the Grants.gov Workspace, a shared, online environment where members of a grant team may simultaneously access and edit different webforms within an application. For each funding opportunity announcement, an applicant creates individual instances of a workspace.

1) *Create a Workspace*: This allows you to complete your Workspace online and route it through your organization for review before submitting.

2) *Complete a Workspace*: Add participants to the workspace, complete all the required forms, and check for errors before submission.

    a. *Adobe Reader*: If you decide not to apply by filling out webforms, you can download individual PDF forms in Workspace so that they will appear similar to other Standard or AMS forms. The individual PDF forms can be downloaded and saved to your local device storage, network drive(s), or external drives, and then accessed through Adobe Reader.

    NOTE: You may need to visit the Adobe Software Compatibility page on Grants.gov to download the appropriate version of the software.

    b. *Mandatory Fields in Forms:* Fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color are mandatory fields you must complete to successfully submit your application.

    c. *Complete SF-424 Fields First*: The forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant name, address, and DUNS number. To trigger this feature, an applicant must complete the SF-424 information first. Once it is completed, the information will transfer to the other forms.

3) *Submit via a Workspace*: Submit your application through Workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab. Grants.gov recommends submitting your application package **at least 24-48 hours prior to the close date** to provide you with time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.

    SPECIAL NOTE: Grants.gov **does not** check for AMS required attachments. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all required attachments listed in section ***4.2 Content and Form of Application Submission*** are included.

4) *Track via a Workspace*: After successfully submitting a workspace package, Grants.gov automatically assigns a Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) to the package, which will be listed on the Confirmation page generated after submission.

Applicant Support: Grants.gov provides additional training resources, including video tutorials. Applicants may also call the 24/7 toll-free support number 1-800-518-4726, or email

support@grants.gov. Grants.gov will issue a ticket number to which you and Grants.gov can refer if the issue is not resolved. For questions related to the specific grant opportunity, contact the persons mentioned in section ***7.0 Agency Contacts***.

4.7.3 TIMELY RECEIPT REQUIREMENTS AND PROOF OF TIMELY SUBMISSION

All applications must be received by the due date established in section ***4.4 Submission Date and Time***. Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by Grants.gov using an electronic date/time stamp generated when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant AOR will then receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/time stamp and Grants.gov tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

When AMS successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov and acknowledges the download of submissions, Grants.gov will electronically acknowledge receipt of the application to the applicant AOR's email address. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the acknowledgement email stating the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application.

AMS will not accept applications packages by fax, email or postal mail. Applications received by Grants.gov after the established due date for the program will be considered late and will not be considered for funding by AMS. See AMS' Policy on Late Applications.

Special Note for Applicants with Slow Internet Connections. Applicants using slow internet, such as dial-up connections, may experience significantly longer transmission times when submitting their application to Grants.gov, especially if there are large attachments contained in the upload. Again, Grants.gov will provide either an error message or a successfully received transmission notification via email to the applicant AOR.

4.7.4 TIPS FOR APPLICANTS

- Register and submit applications early. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE DAY OF THE APPLICATION DEADLINE**.
- Thoroughly read this RFA and follow all the instructions provided by AMS.
- Apply for the correct grant program.
- Make sure you have the most recent copy of Adobe Reader installed on your computer and that it is compatible with Grants.gov software. Grants.gov supports Adobe Reader version 9.0.0 and higher.
- Limit Application File Size/ File Name Characters (50 or less).
- When uploading attachments, click the "Add Attachments" button (do NOT use the "paperclip" icon in Adobe Reader).
- Do not password-protect your documents and make sure all tracked-changes are "accepted".
- Avoid Special Characters in File Names ($, %, &, *, Spanish "ñ", etc.)**.**

- Input the correct DUNS number on the SF-424 cover page.
- Review the Grants.gov Applicant User and Registration Guides:
  http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-faqs.html
  https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.html.

5.0 APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

5.1 PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each application that meets the initial qualification screening requirements (see section ***5.2***) will be reviewed and scored competitively based on the extent to which it addresses the following criteria:

Alignment and Intent ..... **25 Points**

1) The application describes the project's objectives and their relevance to the identified issues or needs of the local or regional food system.
2) The application describes a strong history of or potential for collaboration and engagement among partners to ensure high levels of participation or provides a clear and concise plan for how such engagement will occur, particularly including historically underserved entities such as socially disadvantaged, beginning, and/or limited resource groups.
3) The application describes the proposed focus area of the project and why it is the most appropriate place to conduct partnership activities.
4) The application describes how the partnership adds value to the local or regional food system, as opposed to each entity/partner acting independently of one another.
5) The application identifies the intended benefits of the project and how the partner entities will be involved in achieving them (NOT required if the application is solely for a planning or feasibility project).

Technical Merit ..... **25 Points**

1) The application describes resources that partners will be contributing to the project's development, implementation, and/or management.
2) The application presents a clear, well-conceived, and suitable Work Plan for fulfilling the goals and objectives of the proposed project.
3) The application presents a realistic schedule for implementing and completing the proposed project during the award project period.
4) The application includes, or presents a realistic plan to include, potential collaborating partners that would be appropriate, necessary, and sufficient to achieve the stated project goals and objectives.
5) If the applicant proposes to build upon previous partnership activities, the previous lessons learned are incorporated into the proposed project.

Achievability ..... **15 Points**

1) The Outcome(s) and Indicator(s) are feasible for the scale and scope of the project including:
    a. How indicator numbers were derived, with a clear means to collect feedback to evaluate and achieve each relevant Outcome Indicator; and
    b. The anticipated key factors that are predicted to contribute to or restrict progress toward the applicable indicators, including action steps for addressing identified restricting factors.
2) The application identifies potential challenges to partner recruitment and engagement, and achievement of goals or outcomes, and describes possible strategies to address the challenges.
3) The application describes a monitoring and evaluation methodology that identifies potential feedback mechanisms and metrics that detect changes that occur as a result of project activities.
4) The applicant provides a comprehensive plan to distribute the project's results (both positive and negative) electronically and in person to target audiences, stakeholders, and interested parties.
5) The application describes how the partnership will be sustained beyond the project's period of performance (without grant funds).

Expertise and Partners ..... **25 Points**

1) The application represents a substantial, effective, and diverse array of relevant partners to accomplish the project's goals and objectives and meet the needs of the intended beneficiaries, including:
    a. Commitment from the key staff, demonstrated through Letters of Commitment from Partner Organizations;
    b. The key staff who will be responsible for managing the projects and the individuals (name and title) who comprise the Project Team; and
    c. The expertise and experience of the Project Team necessary to successfully manage and implement the proposed project.
2) The application demonstrates a commitment from partners to perform specific roles in order to achieve project goals and outcomes.
3) The application describes plans for coordination, communication, data sharing, and reporting among members of the partnership and other stakeholder groups.

Fiscal Plan and Resources ..... **10 Points**

1) The Budget and Justification provides a clear description for each budget line item and is consistent with the size and scope of the project.
2) The Budget and Justification relates logically to the project narrative.
3) The fiscal plan clearly describes the intended use of partner resources (cash or in-kind).
4) The applicant demonstrates its partners' contribution of non-Federal cash resources or in-kind contributions are available and obtainable for the project as evidenced through the submitted Matching Funds and Letters of Match Verification.

5.2 REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

Step 1: Initial Qualification Screening

To meet the basic eligibility requirements, applications must be responsive to the RFA. Please see AMS' Non-Responsive Application Policy for more information.

Step 2: Technical Review

Each application is evaluated by a panel of peer reviewers. AMS will make every attempt to match reviewers with applications in their areas of expertise. Each reviewer signs a conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement regarding any assigned proposals. The peer review panels evaluate their assigned proposals using instructions prepared by AMS officials. Individual reviewers confer with other team members to derive a consensus score. The consensus review serves as the basis for awarding and allocating grant funds and focuses on strengths and weaknesses of each proposal.

Step 3: Administrative Review

AMS will conduct a final administrative evaluation of each review panel's top rankings and recommendations. In addition to the rank and scores, AMS reviews each application to ensure that potential recommended projects align with the scope of the RFA, allowability of budget items, available funding, geographic diversity, and USDA priorities. AMS staff will work with top-ranked applicants to negotiate any revisions if necessary and possible. AMS will also assess an organization's ability to account for the use of Federal funds and monitor the performance associated with these monies using the guidance provided by 2 CFR § 205(c).

6.0 AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

6.1 AWARD NOTICES

Upon announcement of the Federal awards, AMS will prepare and send a Notice of Award and Grant Agreement to each recipient for signature by the appropriate official. Grant Agreements consist of a 1-page Agreement Face Sheet (AMS-33) that will be signed by AMS and the AOR.

The Notice of Award and Grant Agreement will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the information described in 2 CFR § 200.210 and a reference to the AMS General Terms and Conditions.

6.2 UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Unsuccessful applicants will be contacted by AMS via email as soon as possible after the RFSP awards are announced. The unsuccessful applicants will be provided anonymous review panel consensus comments regarding their proposals as feedback.

6.3 ADMINISTRATIVE AND NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS

As part of the Notice of Award and Grant Agreement, all AMS recipients must abide by the AMS General Terms and Conditions, which reference applicable *Administrative and National Policy Requirements*.

6.4 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Reporting and award closeout requirements are included in the AMS General Terms and Conditions. If there are any program or award-specific award terms, those will be identified in the award.

7.0 AGENCY CONTACTS

Applicants and other interested parties are encouraged to contact:

7.1 LEAD GRANTS MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST

Patrick Kelley

Phone: 202-205-3941
E-Mail: Patrick.Kelley@usda.gov

7.2 GRANTS MANAGEMENT SPECIALISTS

Kristin Abernathy

Phone: 202-308-7403
E-Mail: Kristin.Abernathy@usda.gov

Angela Davis

Phone: 404-670-2900
E-Mail: Angela.Davis@usda.gov

7.3 ADDRESS

Regional Food System Partnerships
USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-0269
https://www.ams.usda.gov/rfsp

7.4 GRANTS.GOV QUESTIONS

All questions regarding Grants.gov technical assistance must be directed to Grants.gov's Applicant Support.

8.0 OTHER INFORMATION

8.1 DEFINITIONS

Local and regional food means food that is raised, produced, aggregated, stored, processed, and distributed in the locality or region where the final product is marketed to consumers, so that the total distance that the product travels between the farm or ranch where the product originates and the point

of sale to the end consumer is kept to a minimum, or both the final market and the origin of the product are within the same State, territory, or tribal land.

Local or Regional Food Business or Enterprise means an organization or business entity that functions as an intermediary between producers (farmers or growers) and buyers by carrying out one or more local or regional food supply chain activities—including aggregating, storing, processing, and/or distributing locally or regionally produced food products—to meet local and regional market demand.

Value-Added Agricultural Product means any agricultural commodity or product that:

- Has undergone a change in the physical state or form of the product, such as milling wheat into flour or making strawberries into jam;
- Is produced in a manner that enhances the value of the agricultural commodity or product, such as organically produced products;
- Is physically segregated in a manner that results in the enhancement of the value of that commodity or product, such as an identity preserved product;
- Is a source of farm- or ranch-based renewable energy, including E–85 fuel; or
- Is aggregated and marketed as a locally produced agricultural food product and, as a result of the change in physical state or the manner in which the agricultural commodity or product is produced and segregated, the customer base for the commodity or product is expanded and a greater portion of revenue derived from the marketing, processing, or physical segregation is made available to the producer of the commodity or product.

Mid-tier Value Chain means a local or regional supply network that links independent producers with businesses and cooperatives that market value-added agricultural product in a manner that:

- Targets and strengthens the profitability and competitiveness of small and medium-size farms and ranches that are structured as a family farm; and
- Obtains agreement from an eligible agricultural producer group, farmer or rancher cooperative, or majority-controlled producer-based business venture that is engaged in the value chain on a marketing strategy.

Limited Resource Entity means an organization that provides technical assistance services to and engages historically underserved farmers and ranchers in addressing their needs. See USDA definition of ***Historically Underserved Groups*** for further information.

8.2 EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

8.3 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

The Freedom of Information Act of 1966 (5 U.S.C. § 552) (FOIA) and the Privacy Act of 1974 (5 U.S.C. § 552a), as implemented by USDA's regulations (7 CFR § 1, Subpart A) govern the release or withholding of information to the public in connection with this Federal award. The release of information under these laws and regulations applies only to records held by AMS and imposes no requirement on the recipient or any subrecipient to permit or deny public access to their records.

FOIA requests for records relating to this Federal award may be directed to USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, FOIA/PA Officer, Room 3943-S, Mail Stop 0202, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-0273, Telephone: (202) 720-2498; or email: AMS.FOIA@usda.gov.

8.4 PAPERWORK REDUCTION

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. § 3501 et seq), an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0581-0240.