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Recognizing & Addressing Maternal Warning Signs for Morbidity & Mortality During Pregnancy & the Postpartum Period

**Fiscal Year 2023 Request for Applications (RFA)
Assistance Listing Number (ALN): 10.557**

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**Application Due Date: 11:59 pm, Eastern Standard Time (EST),
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Form RFA 01-23

Form RFA 04-2023

Application Checklist

This Application Checklist provides applicants with a list of the required actions and documents that must be completed. However, FNS expects that applicants will read the entire RFA prior to the submission of their application and comply with all requirements outlined in the solicitation. The Application Checklist is for applicant use only and should not be submitted as part of the Application Package.

Complete the following **at least four weeks** prior to submission:

- ☐ Obtain a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number;
- ☐ Register the UEI number in the System for Award Management (SAM); and,
- ☐ Register in [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov).

When **preparing your application**, ensure:

- ☐ Application format and narrative meet the requirements included in Section 4 – Application and Submission Information. This includes page limits, priorities outlined in Section 5 – Application Review Information, and all necessary attachments.

When **preparing your budget**, ensure the following information is included:

- ☐ All key staff proposed to be paid by this grant.
- ☐ The percentage of time the Project Director will devote to the project in full-time equivalents (FTEs).
- ☐ Your organization's fringe benefit rate and amount, as well as the basis for the computation.
- ☐ The type of fringe benefits to be covered with Federal funds.
- ☐ Itemized travel expenses (including type of travel), travel justification, and basis for lodging estimate.
- ☐ Types of equipment and supplies, justifications, and estimates, ensuring that the budget is in line with the project description.
- ☐ Information for all contracts and justification for any sole-source contracts
- ☐ Justification, description, and an itemized list of all consultant services.
- ☐ Indirect cost information (either a copy of a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) or if no agreement exists and the applicant has never been approved for a NICRA, they may charge up to 10% de minimis). If an applicant is requesting the de minimis rate or indirect costs are not required, please state this in the budget narrative.

When **submitting** your application, ensure you have submitted the following:

- ☐ FNS-906 – Grant Program Accounting System & Financial Capability Questionnaire
- ☐ Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (PDF - Upload using the “Add Attachments” button under SF-424 item #15)
- ☐ Resumes of key staff
- ☐ Letters of support/commitment from key staff and partners
- ☐ Additional attachments as required

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1. Program Description and Objectives

Executive Summary

WIC provides important services to eligible individuals and families; however, research is needed to identify additional opportunities and logical, evidence-based pathways to improve maternal health in the context and with deep understanding of the WIC program. While a body of evidence is available detailing interventions to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality,^{1,2} there are several limitations to relating this research to the WIC setting: reviews are relatively dated, interventions have largely not been tested in the WIC setting, there is a lack in diversity of populations addressed in these interventions, and technology and service delivery approaches have changed drastically in recent years resulting (e.g., remote and hybrid service delivery).

This RFA will provide up to \$5,000,000 in funding, through a one-time cooperative agreement, to an external entity that will provide financial, technical, and evaluation to initiate and administer a competitive subgrant program for WIC State and local agencies. Eligible external entities include accredited public and private institutions of higher education (colleges/universities), non-profit research entities, and other non-profit organizations. The legislative authority for this Request for Applications is contained in the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 Section 17 (g)(5)² as amended. Under this provision, subject to the availability of funds, the Secretary of Agriculture may award competitive grants and cooperative agreements for the support of research projects to further the WIC program.

Background

In the United States, hundreds of individuals die as a result of pregnancy and birth related complications annually³; another 50,000 individuals are impacted by complications related to pregnancy and birth experiences⁴. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is widely considered to be one of the most successful nutrition intervention policies and is an important part of the social safety net intended to improve maternal and child health. More research is needed to understand how interventions to detect early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality can be successfully tailored to a WIC setting. Therefore, the goal of this request for applications (RFA) is to initiate and support a rigorous research program that will identify and evaluate the implementation of evidence-based interventions to detect and address (e.g., complete referrals for needed services) early warning

¹ Gülmezoglu AM, Lawrie TA, Hezelgrave N, et al. Interventions to Reduce Maternal and Newborn Morbidity and Mortality. In: Black RE, Laxminarayan R, Temmerman M, et al., editors. Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health: Disease Control Priorities, Third Edition (Volume 2). Washington (DC): The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank; 2016 Apr 5. Chapter 7. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK361904/> doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-0348-2_ch7

² Katon JG, Enquobahrie DA, Jacobsen K, Zephyrin L. Policies for Reducing Maternal Morbidity and Mortality and Enhancing Equity in Maternal Health. (2021). Available at: <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/fund-reports/2021/nov/policies-reducing-maternal-morbidity-mortality-enhancing-equity>. Accessed April 21, 2023.

³ Hoyert DL. Maternal mortality rates in the United States, 2021. NCHS Health E-Stats. 2023. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:124678>

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Severe Maternal Morbidity in the United States*. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/severematernalmorbidity.html>

signs of maternal morbidity and mortality in the WIC setting. This RFA will provide up to \$5,000,000 in funding, through a one-time cooperative agreement, to an external entity to administer a competitive subgrant program for WIC State and local agencies. Eligible external entities include accredited public and private institutions of higher education (colleges/universities), non-profit research entities, and other non-profit organizations. By the end of the cooperative agreement period of performance, the successful recipient of this RFA will accomplish four objectives:

- 1) Develop and share broadly a clear and concise analysis of evidence-based interventions, communications campaigns, and promising models for recognizing and addressing early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality that can be evaluated in diverse WIC settings and program delivery approaches. (“**Review Evidence**”);
- 2) Competitively select WIC State agencies (SAs) and/or Local agencies (LAs) to evaluate the implementation of evidence-based and promising well-designed interventions intended to identify and address early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality in a WIC setting. (“**Subgrants**”);
- 3) Provide technical assistance to subgrantees as they rigorously evaluate the interventions implemented by subgrantees, including a process evaluation and cost estimate. (“**TA and Evaluation**”); and
- 4) Develop and implement a framework to synthesize findings across subgrant studies and broadly disseminate findings. (“**Dissemination**”)

Program Description

Introduction

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) works to end hunger and promote nutrition security⁵ through the administration of a variety of federal nutrition assistance programs. WIC is a federal nutrition assistance program that serves pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding individuals; infants; and children up to five years old with who are low-income and at nutrition risk. WIC provides nutritious foods, nutrition education including breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health and social services to participants in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, 33 Indian Tribal Organizations, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In fiscal year (FY) 2022, roughly 6.3 million women, infants, and children across the United States received WIC benefits.⁶

Legislative Authority:

The legislative authority for this Request for Applications (RFA) is contained in the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 Section 17 (g) (5)⁷ as amended. Under this program, subject to the availability of

⁵ USDA Food and Nutrition Service. (2022). USDA Actions on Nutrition Security. Available at: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/usda-actions-nutrition-security.pdf>. Accessed on May 4, 2023.

⁶ USDA Economic Research Service. WIC Program. Available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/wic-program/>. Accessed on September 18, 2023.

⁷ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/wic-laws-and-regulations>. Accessed on April 1, 2023

funds, the Secretary of Agriculture may award competitive grants and cooperative agreements for the support of research projects to further the WIC program.

This grant will be awarded as a cooperative agreement. This agreement is a legal instrument reflecting a relationship between the Federal government and the Grantee. Cooperative agreements will allow more involvement and collaboration by FNS in this project.

Background

Maternal health, defined as the health of childbearing individuals during the pregnancy and postpartum periods, can be influenced by pre-pregnancy health and has the ability to impact health throughout the lifespan.⁸ Across the United States, rates of maternal morbidity (any health condition attributed to and/or aggravated by pregnancy and childbirth that has negative outcomes to the woman's well-being) and mortality (the death of a woman while pregnant or within 1 year of the end of pregnancy from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy) are unacceptably high and increasing at alarming rates.⁹ In 2021, more than 1,200 people died of maternal causes at a rate of almost 33 deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to 861 deaths (23.8 per 100,000 live births) in 2020 and 754 deaths (20.1 per 100,000 live births) in 2019.¹⁰ More than 80 percent of these deaths can be prevented, and half occur from one week to one year after delivery.¹¹ About three quarters of maternal deaths are caused by mental health conditions, hemorrhage, cardiovascular and coronary conditions, infection, thrombotic embolism, and cardiomyopathy based on a review of deaths in 36 States.¹² Moreover, pregnancy and postpartum complications including anemia, anxiety and depression, hypertension, and infections, among other health conditions, has increased substantially in the US in recent years, impacting more than 50,000 individuals annually.¹³

While rates of maternal morbidity and mortality are unacceptably high across the US, the distribution of these conditions is exacerbated by systems that have historically put the lives and wellbeing of minority populations at higher risk than their white counterparts.¹⁴ According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), among the 50,000 reported pregnancy-related health complications recorded annually, Black women are at least three times more likely to die due to a pregnancy-related cause when compared to White women; risk is also substantially elevated for American Indian and Alaskan Native (AIAN) women.¹⁵

⁸ Williams D. Pregnancy: a stress test for life. *Curr Opin Obstet Gynecol*. 2003 Dec;15(6):465-71. doi: 10.1097/00001703-200312000-00002. PMID: 14624211.

⁹ Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Web Portal. NIH. Available at <https://orwh.od.nih.gov/mmm-portal/what-mmm>. Accessed May 2, 2023.

¹⁰ Hoyert DL. Maternal mortality rates in the United States, 2021. *NCHS Health E-Stats*. 2023. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:124678>

¹¹ Trost SL, Beauregard J, Njie F, et al. Pregnancy-Related Deaths: Data from Maternal Mortality Review Committees in 36 US States, 2017-2019. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Department of Health and Human Services; 2022.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Severe Maternal Morbidity in the United States*. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/severematernalmorbidity.html>

¹⁴ Trost SL, Beauregard J, Njie F, et al. Pregnancy-Related Deaths: Data from Maternal Mortality Review Committees in 36 US States, 2017-2019. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, US Department of Health and Human Services; 2022.

¹⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). *Severe Maternal Morbidity in the United States*. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/severematernalmorbidity.html>

Though each instance and circumstance of morbidity or mortality is different and underlying health conditions such as existing cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes play a role in health risk, racial, ethnic, social, and economic disparities and biases are important factors contributing to disparities in pregnancy-related deaths and adverse outcomes – when these medical conditions are not present, racial disparities persist. Alongside concerns about increasing rates of maternal morbidity and mortality, racial disparities increased during the COVID-19 health emergency. According to a report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Black women had the highest maternal mortality rates across all racial and ethnic groups in 2020 and 2021 and also experienced the largest increase compared to the year prior to the pandemic (2019).¹⁶ Recently, studies have shown that social risk factors including historic exposure to racial trauma, discrimination, systemic barriers to accessing care, implicit bias within the healthcare system, and a lack of trust in established medical systems can result in further harm to individuals who face additional barriers to accessing care and in being believed when expressing their health concerns.¹⁷

In light of the increasingly stark maternal health crisis in the US and the stark disparities that exist for populations of color, action is needed to support interventions that improve implementation to address maternal health in federal programs. To this end, the Biden-Harris Administration issued a Fact Sheet in June 2022 detailing a “Maternal Health Blueprint” in which they stated a commitment to “cutting the rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, reducing the disparities in maternal health outcomes, and improving the overall experience during and after pregnancy for people across the country.”¹⁸ USDA, alongside many partner organizations in the federal government, continues to support efforts to address this issue through research, engagement, and implementation.

Established in 1974, WIC is administered by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is one of many federal partners engaged in whole-of-government approaches to combating adverse maternal health outcomes. WIC provides nutritious foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and referrals to health, social, and community services to participants at no charge. Individuals who are postpartum are eligible for up to 12 months if they are breastfeeding and 6 months if they are not breastfeeding. For pregnant individuals, WIC seeks to improve fetal development and reduce the incidence of low birth weight, short gestation, anemia, and other maternal complications through intervention during the prenatal period. For breastfeeding and postpartum individuals, WIC also seeks to improve dietary intake, promote and support breastfeeding as the optimal method of infant feeding, and continues to provide important referrals to healthcare, social, and other community services.

¹⁶ Government Accountability Office. (2022). Outcomes Worsened and Disparities Persisted During the Pandemic. Available at: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-105871.pdf>. Accessed April 28, 2023.

¹⁷ Njoku A, Evans M, Nimo-Sefah L, Bailey J. Listen to the Whispers before They Become Screams: Addressing Black Maternal Morbidity and Mortality in the United States. *Healthcare*. 2023; 11(3):438. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11030438>

¹⁸ The White House. *FACT SHEET: President Biden’s and Vice President Harris’s Maternal Health Blueprint Delivers for Women, Mothers, and Families*. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/24/fact-sheet-president-bidens-maternal-health-blueprint-delivers-for-women-mothers-and-families/>. Accessed April 2, 2023.

WIC provides important services to eligible individuals and families; however, research is needed to identify additional opportunities and logical, evidence-based pathways to improve maternal health in the context and with deep understanding of the WIC program. While a body of evidence is available detailing interventions to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality,^{19,20} there are several limitations to relating this research to the WIC setting: reviews are relatively dated, interventions have largely not been tested in the WIC setting, there is a lack in diversity of populations addressed in these interventions, and technology and service delivery approaches have changed drastically in recent years resulting (e.g., remote and hybrid service delivery).

Program Description

To address these gaps and support current and future research and programming to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality, the goal of this RFA is to initiate and support a rigorous research program that will identify and evaluate the implementation of evidence-based interventions to detect and address early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality in the WIC setting.

The grantee is expected to propose a robust subgrant program to support WIC SAs and LAs in identifying, selecting, implementing, and evaluating interventions to detect and address early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality. The program will evaluate available evidence-based interventions for strength and potential for implementation testing in a WIC setting and to initiate, support, and evaluate a robust subgrant program for WIC SAs and LAs. Findings from this analysis will inform and be broadly disseminated to WIC programs and other interested parties and will be used to inform actions to improve maternal health in groups at highest risk of maternal morbidity and mortality.

The following expands on the activities necessary for the grantee to meet the aforementioned objectives by specifying a minimum set of activities that the grantee will conduct, in collaboration with FNS. In addition to the activities specified below, FNS expects that applicants will propose innovative approaches to meet the overall Goal and Objectives of this cooperative agreement:

Objective 1: Review Evidence

The Grantee should conduct a scoping review to identify evidence-based interventions, communications campaigns, technological interventions, screening and referral tools, and promising models (collectively referred to as “interventions” moving forward) for recognizing and addressing early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality. Interventions do not need evidence of effectiveness in a WIC setting but should be appropriate for tailored deployment within the scope of WIC Program and consider services provided in WIC settings – including in-person, hybrid, and remote services; rural, urban, tribal, and territories – in order to evaluate

¹⁹ Gülmezoglu AM, Lawrie TA, Hezelgrave N, et al. Interventions to Reduce Maternal and Newborn Morbidity and Mortality. In: Black RE, Laxminarayan R, Temmerman M, et al., editors. Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health: Disease Control Priorities, Third Edition (Volume 2). Washington (DC): The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank; 2016 Apr 5. Chapter 7. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK361904/> doi: 10.1596/978-1-4648-0348-2_ch7

²⁰ Katon JG, Enquobahrie DA, Jacobsen K, Zephyrin L. Policies for Reducing Maternal Morbidity and Mortality and Enhancing Equity in Maternal Health. (2021). Available at: <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/fund-reports/2021/nov/policies-reducing-maternal-morbidity-mortality-enhancing-equity>. Accessed April 21, 2023.

aspects of implementation that will determine the success of the intervention and appropriateness for implementation research in a WIC setting.

Applicants should describe a comprehensive strategy for identifying interventions to detect early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality and describe how they will gather, extract, and evaluate the strength of evidence and implementation details relevant to deployment in a WIC setting (e.g., cost, time to implement, how the intervention would impact the current clinic operations and participant experience such as clinic visit time). Applicants should clearly describe their proposed approach to identifying and gathering sources for the scoping review, which should include formal academic sources (e.g., PubMed, Web of Science) and informal sources such as federal agency websites (e.g., CDC, NIH). Applicants should make clear how they plan to assess interventions for appropriateness, given the diversity of WIC service delivery modalities (e.g., in-person, remote, hybrid), WIC program settings (e.g., urban, rural, tribal, territory), populations (e.g., pregnant, post-partum; diversity of race, ethnicity, age, language and other identities), and with consideration for the impact that these interventions could have on WIC clinic flow (participant and WIC staff movement through a WIC clinic visit). Applicants shall describe how they would gather important information from WIC agencies, staff, and participants to assess the appropriateness of interventions for a WIC setting and population. This could include but is not limited to the establishment of a technical working group, a small number of focus groups, interviews, or other approaches.

Applicants should also identify a relevant implementation and dissemination science framework (e.g., CFIR, RE-AIM) that will guide information extraction from sources identified above and should explain why the designated framework is appropriate for the project and how the approach will meet the goal and objectives outlined for this partnership. The scoping review should, in addition to describing intervention and evaluation elements, evaluate the strength of findings and potential for implementation in a WIC setting.

Applicants should propose a process for disseminating the results of their evidence review to a broad audience, most notably WIC SAs and LAs. The resulting reports should include, but are not limited to, information about the overall goal of the interventions identified, reach, effectiveness/efficacy, adoption, implementation, and maintenance. Applicants should describe a process for identifying a number of interventions most appropriate for testing implementation in a WIC setting and ensure that elements of the intervention are available to use for implementation during the subsequent subgrant process. Applicants should describe how they will assess, from the interventions evaluated in Objective 1, a subset of interventions most appropriate for implementation in WIC setting, including the criteria for the selection, how interested parties' perspectives would be included in the decision making process, and how these interventions will be described in detail to potential subgrant applicants (WIC State agencies, as described in Objective 2). Dissemination shall be thoroughly described and should include the formation of a toolkit or other similar deliverable that could be used by subgrant applicants to determine which evidence-based intervention might be most appropriate and realistic for implementation testing in different WIC settings, given the diversity of populations and needs. Applicants should also propose innovative approaches to disseminating findings from this review to larger audiences including the broader research community and programs serving similar populations (e.g., Federally Qualified Health Centers).

Objective 2: Subgrants

During the period of performance of the cooperative agreement, the Grantee shall initiate and maintain a competitive subgrant program to foster innovative implementation and dissemination science research related to identifying and addressing early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality in WIC settings, building on information gathered during Objective 1.

The Grantee will conduct at least one round of competitive subgrants, making funding available to WIC State and local agencies. Subgrant applicants who propose projects focused on addressing health equity among populations with the highest risk for adverse outcomes will be given priority (e.g., populations with high rates of maternal morbidity and mortality; those living in maternity care deserts). Applicants shall include a description of how they could assess need, such as using the Maternal and Child Health Bureau's Maternal and Infant Health Mapping Tool²¹ or another similar, data-driven, approach to assessing disparities, need, and risk. In preparation for subgrants, the Grantee will draft and complete the required paperwork, which will be approved by FNS. When describing how they will administer subgrant program(s), applicants should consider that FNS intends for the SA and LA subgrant application process to be as simple as possible. As such, applicants shall describe how they will provide technical assistance to WIC SAs and LAs that wish to apply for subgrant funding (e.g., webinars, office hours). The Grantee will also create and implement a plan for the pre-application phase, and how they will provide technical assistance for interested subgrant applicants in communities with limited access to resources supporting maternal health, communities with high rates of maternal morbidity and mortality, and areas with high rates of maternal health disparities (more requirements for technical assistance are included under Objective 3).

Using information gathered when addressing Objective 1, Applicants should propose a target number and scale of subgrants and the number of rounds through which subgrants shall be administered as well as a justification for each element of the approach. The subgrant RFA will describe the subgrant opportunity, explain subgrantee eligibility, and establish evaluation criteria for the subawards.

Subgrant applications should include, at a minimum, a full research narrative including a clearly defined set of research questions and objectives that articulate how the proposed project will provide insights into the effectiveness of implementation strategies in their WIC setting; the proposed data source(s) used for the analysis; a detailed budget justification; letters of support, if needed; documentation of procedures used to maintain the quality and integrity of data and analyses; and bio sketches for key members of the research team. Before the subgrant RFA is published, FNS must approve all RFA content. Applicants for this RFA should build at least a 6-week review timeline into their overall project guidelines.

Applicants should also describe how they will publicize the subgrant opportunity to WIC SAs and LAs, with specific attention to how the opportunity will include a focus on addressing health equity. Ensuring equitable access to the subgrant program is an FNS priority; therefore, applicants should directly address this equity priority in their applications and describe how they intend to operationalize the equity opportunity in this subgrant program. Applicants should also describe how subgrant applicants will receive equitable consideration for subgrant awards through the subgrant application evaluation process. If necessary, the applicant will be responsible for supporting subgrant awardee IRB applications as necessary.

²¹ Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Infant Health Mapping Tool. Available at <https://data.hrsa.gov/maps/mchb/>. Accessed September 19, 2023.

After subgrant selection, the Grantee will submit updated project summaries to FNS for the publication of subgrant projects on the FNS website and will schedule and hold a virtual meeting, inviting subgrantees, key FNS staff, and members of the grantee's implementation team.

Objective 3: Technical Assistance and Evaluation

In order to support well-designed rigorous evaluations that contribute to the WIC program mission and effectiveness, the grantee will provide technical assistance and evaluation support using an implementation science framework (e.g., CFIR, RE-AIM) to subgrantees for the duration of all subgrant projects. Approaches to providing support could include but are not limited to regular subgrantee meetings, communities of practice, and expert consultation. In addition to providing individualized and collaborative evaluation and technical support, Applicants should describe a clear plan to synthesize findings such that information will be generalizable for WIC agencies and broader audiences.

The Applicant should include a clear description of how they intend to support subgrant awardees throughout the process (including pre-application TA, see Objective 2), focusing on aspects of dissemination and implementation science that are most relevant to the WIC program. Support should focus on evaluation of the following:

- (1) How the applicant will regularly communicate with subgrantees and the frequency of this communication;
- (2) How the applicant will support subgrantees to develop capacity to maintain interventions after the subgrant period concludes;
- (3) How the applicant will coordinate opportunities for subgrantees to hear and learn from each other through a structured learning collaborative, coordinated evaluations, or other approach that includes regular dialogue between subgrantees;
- (4) How the applicant will collaborate with FNS and support subgrantees to disseminate findings to WIC SAs and LAs after the conclusion of the project; and
- (5) How the applicant will liaise with FNS and encourage dialogue between the program and subgrantees to maximize collaborative learning opportunities and identify opportunities for scaling successful interventions after the conclusion of the subgrant period.

Objective 4: Synthesis and Dissemination

Finally, the Grantee will develop and implement a framework to synthesize and disseminate findings. Applications for this USDA RFA should articulate the proposed approach to developing an evaluation plan for subgrant projects. Other measures, including key performance indicators (KPIs), shall be included in the evaluation to capture relevant outcomes and process metrics. The synthesis should describe subgrantee interventions and evaluations, individually, and draw from collective learning across grant and subgrantee activities to promote generalizability across WIC settings. The synthesis should include tools to increase uptake and scale-up of evidence-based interventions specific to the WIC setting and promote dissemination to key interested parties. In addition, the Grantee should develop state-specific reports appropriate for dissemination on the FNS website.

FNS encourages proposals that include innovative dissemination strategies and that focus on the translation of research findings into actionable recommendations and useful tools for FNS and WIC SAs and LAs. The grantee should develop and maintain a comprehensive strategy to disseminate results of funded subgrant studies through print or electronic methods, including but not limited to, innovative use of web-based communication, social media, infographics, podcasts, newsletters, working papers, and webinars. The grantee will also be responsible for supporting and encouraging subgrantees to broadly disseminate findings from their individual evaluations to a variety of audiences and through multiple mechanisms. Foremost, the Grantee shall support subgrantees as they disseminate findings to other WIC agencies at meetings and conferences.

Minimum set of research questions to address though this RFA

- What are the characteristics and effectiveness of evidence-based interventions focused on identifying, addressing, and preventing maternal morbidity and mortality in the setting of WIC Program's services or similar settings?
- What are the most effective strategies to incorporate evidence-based approaches to identifying, addressing, and preventing maternal morbidity and mortality into WIC setting?
- How can interventions to improve WIC staff ability to recognize and address (e.g., complete appropriate referrals for) early warning signs maternal morbidity and mortality to assure integration and program integrity?
- How is implementation impacted by contextual factors and how can contextual factors be modified to enhance the chances for intervention success?
- Are there existing practices, biases, or interventions that could be discontinued or modified to improve early detection of maternal morbidity and mortality warning signs in the WIC setting?

Key Objectives

Below is a list of the Program Objectives. As noted in Section 4, within the "Activities/Indicators Tracker," proposed activities should be clearly aligned to these objectives and their associated activities and indicators.

Application proposals must include all four objectives identified below. Note that if awarded, grantees will be required to report on progress towards activities aligned with the required objective(s) and must use the FNS-908 Performance Progress Report. Carefully considering proposed activities and indicators will prepare grantees for their progress reporting requirements if awarded.

#	Objective
1	Develop and share broadly a clear and concise analysis of evidence-based interventions, communications campaigns, and promising models for recognizing and addressing early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality that can be evaluated in diverse WIC settings and program delivery approaches. ("Review Evidence")
2	Competitively select WIC State agencies (SAs) and/or Local agencies (LAs) to evaluate the implementation of evidence-based and promising well-designed interventions intended to identify and address early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality in a WIC setting. ("Subgrants")
3	Provide technical assistance (TA) to subgrantee applicants (pre-application TA) and subgrantees (post-award TA) as they rigorously evaluate the interventions

	implemented by subgrantees, including a process evaluation and cost estimate. (“ TA and Evaluation ”)
4	Develop and implement a framework to synthesize findings across subgrant studies and broadly disseminate findings. (“ Dissemination ”)

Purpose of Cooperative Agreement

FNS. To the extent practicable, FNS is available to provide technical consultation to the Grantee as needed. FNS will comment on major project aspects and issues in advance of their implementation in a manner and timeframe agreed upon between the Grantee and FNS.

At FNS’s discretion, FNS involvement with the Grantee may include:

1. Providing comments on and having ongoing conversations with the Grantee regarding their plans to meet this RFA’s requirements;
2. Reviewing administration, dissemination, and evaluation (once designed) plans associated with implementing the selected telehealth innovations at WIC agencies funded by this cooperative agreement;
3. Approving the date and time of meetings or conferences;
4. Approving the agendas for meetings or conferences;
5. Reviewing and co-authoring manuscripts;
6. Receiving copies of all Grantee-produced documents (e.g. Final report, peer-reviewed publication upon submission) resulting from this cooperative agreement.

Grantee: For purposes of this RFA, the Grantee is the accredited public and private institutions of higher education (colleges/universities), non-profit research entities, or other non-profit organizations that will be competitively selected based on the merits of its application. The Grantee has overall responsibility for administering the competitive subgrant RFA, awarding and monitoring subgrants, coordinating project implementations, evaluating project success, providing technical and evaluation-based assistance, developing and disseminating deliverables and implementation practices/tools, and reporting to FNS.

The Grantee shall:

1. Select or hire appropriately credentialed personnel to manage and operate project components.
2. Delegate responsibilities to their staff or other partners as appropriate.
3. Conduct appropriate training and provide necessary support for staff, partners, and subgrantees to successfully handle project responsibilities. These responsibilities include, but are not limited to:
 - a. providing data on participating WIC State and local agencies and external organizations to FNS,
 - b. providing subgrantees training and/or consultation on Section 508 compliance to ensure that all documents circulated or published meet Section 508 standards,
 - c. fulfilling obligations to FNS, and
 - d. coordinating site visits to participating sites for FNS if requested.
4. Keep FNS informed on critical junctures and checkpoints after award of cooperative agreement, including updates to plans that are submitted in preliminary form in the application, as well as plans developed after award of subgrants.

5. Meet specific obligations and approval points as specified by the cooperative agreement (FNS has provided reference review timelines throughout this RFA).
6. Submit timely progress reports, financial reports, and annual reports throughout the award period and submit a final progress report and final financial report.
7. Attend and facilitate grant and subgrant progress meetings.
8. Ensure subgrantees account for project funds separately from Federal food and nutrition assistance administrative funds and establish financial and managerial reporting controls to assure project funds are not commingled or used inappropriately. The Grantee must establish and maintain documented evidence clearly demonstrating expenditures of project funds are used solely for project purposes. A separate and distinct audit trail must be established and maintained for the expenditure of project funds that clearly demonstrates that they are used solely for project purposes.
9. Provide FNS with any data files created and used to generate reports, presentations, and publications resulting from this grant. Such data shall be accompanied with analytic code, source code, output files, and codebooks and other applicable documentation sufficient for FNS to replicate analyses.
10. Carry out all activities necessary to fulfill the items as described in this RFA.
11. Coordinate other grant-related dissemination activities.
12. Ensure you include the requirement of a signed subaward agreement with all subaward organizations (signed by the sub awardees authorized official).
13. For internal use and informational purposes, provide FNS with an electronic copy of all documents resulting from this cooperative agreement.

This grant will be awarded in the form of a Cooperative Agreement. The roles and responsibilities of the FNS and the Cooperator are as follows:

The Grantee shall work cooperatively with FNS to:

1. Within 4 weeks of the start of this cooperative agreement's period of performance, host a kick-off and project planning meeting where the Grantee will present its proposal and its plan to disseminate the RFA and work with USDA and relevant partners to form project ideas. Additionally, potential evaluation strategies shall be presented, and the implementation and evaluation framework shall be presented and discussed.
2. Within 6 weeks of the start of this cooperative agreement's period of performance, submit a project timeline based on the proposal and any changes discussed during the kick-off and project planning meetings.
3. Grantee is expected to set up a project website for communication and dissemination of resources and materials related to this project. All web content must be approved by FNS prior to launch. FNS requires 2 weeks for review and 1 week to approve final website.
4. Two months prior to the scheduled release of the subgrantee RFA, lead a virtual meeting with FNS during which the Grantee presents and explains the subgrant RFA, including the communication plan for the RFA, to FNS.
5. Prior to selection of subgrantees, submit to FNS the proposals and summaries of all proposals submitted and discuss the proposals with FNS. The timeline should allow 2 weeks for FNS to review. At a minimum, summaries shall include the following information: the name of the academic organization and point of contact for the project, the requested award amount, a brief description of the proposed project and data sources, and a subgrant timeline. FNS will approve final selection decisions for the subgrants.
6. Should any subgrant applicants who are not selected request a debrief or explanation, the Grantee is responsible for addressing the request. FNS does not need to review or participate

- in requests for debriefs. Should the Grantee want FNS to review debrief plans or explanation, the timeline should allow 1 week for FNS review.
7. After subgrantees are selected, publish updated summaries of selected subgrant projects on the public-facing website created for this effort and, upon request, prepare publication material for FNS's website. Materials related to or intended for use by subgrantees that will be posted on the public-facing website or FNS's website require FNS's review and approval. The timeline should allow 1 week for FNS to review any materials for website posting.
 8. Following award of subgrants, host a virtual post-competition project meeting with FNS and the subgrant awardees. This meeting will provide an opportunity for subgrantees to present an overview of their project plans and concepts to FNS and the Grantee, who will provide feedback during this meeting and through subsequent communications. The Grantee will also use this opportunity to identify opportunities to coordinate and/or share implementation evaluations across subgrant projects, if possible and relevant.
 9. In collaboration with subgrantees, evaluate the overall project being funded by USDA and document the impact, however significant, that the overall project has on understanding the relationship between subgrant research implementation and measures related to the identification and improvement of maternal health outcomes. Applications for this USDA RFA should articulate the proposed approach to developing an evaluation plan for subgrant projects. Other measures, including KPIs, shall be included in the evaluation to capture relevant outcomes and process metrics.
 10. Fulfill reporting requirements:
 - a. Subgrantee reporting requirements: The Grantee shall require that each subgrantee submit quarterly progress reports as part of their subgrant requirements. The Grantee shall submit these subgrantee quarterly progress reports to FNS as well. Similarly, the Grantee shall require that each subgrantee submit a final report by the end of the subgrantee's period of performance, and the Grantee shall also submit the subgrantees' final report to FNS. Final reports shall describe the subgrant projects; the approach to evaluation, including methodology and any guiding theories or framework; results of the implemented projects; and a discussion of strengths, limitations, lessons learned, and possible next steps in dissemination. Final reports must also include an executive summary.
 - b. Grantee reporting requirements: The Grantee will submit to FNS quarterly progress reports, annual progress reports, and a final report. The Grantee also must submit Subgrantee reports to FNS.
 - c. In addition to subgrantee progress and final reports, the Grantee shall submit its own quarterly and final report to FNS. Similar to the requirements for subgrantee reports, the Grantee's final report shall include an executive summary; a summary of the overall project as well as the subgrant projects funded through this RFA; the approach to evaluation, including methodology and any guiding theories or framework; results of the implemented projects; a discussion of strengths, limitations, lessons learned, and recommendations for future research; and next steps for dissemination of project information, results, and materials to various audiences.
 11. Host an informational webinar for potential applicants to coincide with the posting of the subgrantee RFA(s) to help inform potential subgrantee applicants, provide answers to questions, and provide details about available technical assistance. Presentation materials for the informational webinar must be reviewed and approved by FNS. Timeline should include 2 weeks for FNS review.

12. Aid subgrantees in identifying appropriate evidence-based interventions to research and test, given individual applicants' population needs and implementation context. Technical assistance includes, but is not limited to, providing guidance and technical support and, when needed, consult with FNS.
13. Sponsor and coordinate meetings for subgrantee projects. First, a kick-off and planning orientation meeting at the beginning of the cooperative agreement. Last, a closeout session with subgrantees at the project's completion.
14. Provide FNS with an electronic copy of all dissemination materials (for example, outreach materials and documents, PowerPoint slides, and demonstration and operational versions of applications) resulting from grant and subgrant activity at the time of submission for publication and in final form when published. FNS will provide comments and approval on documentation at FNS discretion. All materials generated by efforts funded through this cooperative agreement must be reviewed and approved by FNS before general distribution. Information to be published by FNS on the USDA website requires FNS review and clearance.
15. Work collaboratively with the FNS and FNS-sponsored contractors on an as-needed basis to clarify work being accomplished and to participate in any research and evaluation efforts related to WIC and maternal health.

Interim Deliverables

Once awarded, the Grantee will provide quarterly progress reports and financial reports to identified FNS contact persons. The Grantee will also produce an **annual report** (not to exceed 10 pages) or another agreed upon interim deliverable, suitable for public release, to FNS for publishing on the FNS website. Annual reports will include a description of the focus area, the implemented projects by sub-grantees, and status of implementation and evaluation for that year and, in subsequent years, since the last annual reporting.

Final Deliverable(s)

The project description shall address how the findings will be disseminated to program stakeholders and the academic community. At a minimum, the Grantee shall prepare and deliver to FNS one final report, or another agreed-upon deliverable or set of deliverables (e.g., special issue of an academic journal) integrating all the information learned from all work funded by this project in an acceptable format for FNS to circulate publicly (e.g., on the FNS website), and submit at least one peer-reviewed journal article for publication based on research using grant funds. All materials that will be published on FNS's website **must be 508-compliant**. Please see <http://www.section508.gov/> for more information. FNS recognizes that the journal article may not be published by the end of the grant period, but a submitted draft is required.

FNS reserves the right to utilize, disseminate, or share any deliverables produced with funding under this grant project in accordance with 2 CFR part 200 (including, but not limited to, tools developed by sub-grantees using grant funds).

Meetings

In meetings with FNS, the Grantee and subgrantees shall provide an overview of the activities conducted since the last meeting, major accomplishments with completion dates and budget, deviations from the proposed plan, lessons learned and challenges encountered, solutions developed to overcome difficulties, preliminary findings, assistance needed from FNS on technical issues, and major planned activities for the next quarter. Should a major issue arise between meetings, the Grantee shall contact the FNS Grants and Program Officers immediately. Between the start of this cooperative agreement and the awarding of the subgrants (~ the first year of this

cooperative agreement), meetings with FNS shall occur at least monthly. The Grantee shall provide FNS with an agenda a minimum 3 business days prior to each call. The Grantee shall also prepare minutes for each call and distribute to FNS no later than 5 business days after the call.

Reports and Products Review

All reports and products generated by efforts funded through this cooperative agreement are subject to review and approval by FNS before publication. This includes reviews of communications materials meant for general and WIC audiences, presentations, final reports, and other items. All materials that will be published on FNS's website or delivered to subgrantees must be Section 508-compliant. Please refer to the following website for more information: <http://www.section508.gov/>. The Grantee is responsible for delivering 508-compliant documents to FNS for publication. All deliverables funded by this cooperative agreement must be provided in an acceptable format for FNS to publish on its website and project findings shall be prepared for presentation at one or more national conferences.

Project timelines should factor in FNS review of reports and products as follows:

- Subgrantee RFAs – 2 drafts plus one final required. FNS requires 2 weeks for the first draft, 4 weeks for the second draft, and 1 week for the final.
- Technical Assistance Materials -- 2 drafts plus one final required. FNS requires 2 weeks to review each draft and 1 week to review the final.
- Project website must be reviewed prior to launch. FNS requires two weeks for review and one week to approve final website. Following website launch, all other materials for website posting require 1 week for FNS review and approval.
- Any communications related materials to be released by or conducted by the Grantee, such as but not limited to press releases, webinars, and presentation materials, require prior FNS review and approval. FNS requires 2 weeks to review a draft and 1 week to approve final materials.
- For any project related reports and products, timelines should allow 2 weeks for items 30 pages or less, and 4 weeks for items greater than 30 pages in length. Timelines should allow for FNS review of two drafts and one final version of all deliverables.

Data and Materials Property

The State possesses and retains all right, title, and interest in and to State's data, and Grantee's use and possession thereof is solely on the Federal Government's behalf. The Federal Government possesses and retains all right, title, and interest in and to materials developed as part of this cooperative agreement. All data, records, documents, communications, and other materials developed and used in the performance of this cooperative agreement shall be maintained by Grantee and made accessible for a period of 3 years from the date of final payment under this Agreement, or for such further period as may be necessary to resolve any matters which may be pending.

2. Federal Award Information

The following information is intended to provide applicants with information to help make informed decisions about proposal submissions.

- Total amount of funding expected to award: \$5,000,000

- Anticipated number of awards: 1
- Minimum award amount (award floor): \$1.00
- Maximum award amount (award ceiling): \$5,000,000.00
- Anticipated award announcement date: March 2024
- Anticipated period of performance (start and end date of the award): March 2024, not to exceed 4 years and two quarters.
- Application due date: February 14, 2024

Please note:

- Grant awards are subject to the availability of funding and/or appropriations of funds.
- FNS reserves the right to use this solicitation and competition to award additional grants this year or the subsequent fiscal year, should additional funds become available.

Allowable Costs

Among other allowable costs, budgets may include expenses related to personnel, contractors, and, whether in-person or virtual, FNS-approved meeting, conference, and training travel expenses.

Unallowable Costs

All costs proposed in the budget and detailed in the budget narrative must be allowable, reasonable, necessary, and allocable. Refer to [2 CFR Part 200 Subpart E – Cost Principles](#) for a detailed description of all allowable and unallowable costs.

3. Eligibility Information

Eligible Applicants

Eligible entities are accredited institutions of higher education (colleges/universities), nonprofit research entities, and other nonprofit organizations.

Entities not meeting these definitions will be deemed ineligible and removed from competition without further consideration. All non-profit organizations must include their 501(c)(3) determination letter issued by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

NOTE: Applicants must submit all required information with their application package, including but not limit to, the proposal narrative and budget narrative, to be considered an eligible applicant. Those applicants who fail to submit any required documents or forms will be deemed INELIGIBLE and removed from further consideration.

Ineligible Applicants

- International (non-U.S. or non-U.S. territories) entities are not eligible to apply.

Cost Sharing or Matching Considerations

There are no cost sharing or matching requirements for this award.

Pre-Award Screening Requirements

In reviewing applications in any discretionary grant competition, prior to making a Federal award, Federal awarding agencies, in accordance with 2 CFR 200.205, are required to review information available through any OMB-designated repositories of government-wide eligibility qualifications or financial integrity information. Additionally, Federal awarding agencies are required to have a framework in place for evaluating the risks posed by applicants before they receive Federal awards. The FNS review of risk posed by applicants will be based on the following:

- SAM.gov, the *System for Award Management*, the Official U.S. Government system that consolidated the capabilities of CCR/FedReg, ORCA, and EPLS
- FAPIIS, the *Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System* that has been established to track contractor misconduct and performance
- FNS Risk Assessment Questionnaire
 - Applicants must complete the Grant Program Accounting System & Financial Capability Questionnaire that allows FNS to evaluate aspects of the applicant's financial stability, quality of management systems, and history of performance, reports, and findings from audits. The questionnaire contains a number of questions that may be an indicator of potential risk.

The evaluation of the information obtained from the designated systems and the risk assessment questionnaire may result in FNS imposing special conditions or additional oversight requirements that correspond to the degree of risk assessed.

Acknowledgement of USDA Support

As outlined in 2 CFR 415.2, grant recipients shall include acknowledgement of USDA Food and Nutrition Service support on any publications written or published with grant support and, if feasible, on any publication reporting the results of, or describing, a grant-supported activity. Recipients shall include acknowledgement of USDA Food and Nutrition Service support on any audiovisual which is produced with grant support, and which has a direct production cost of over \$5,000.

- When acknowledging USDA support, use the following language: "This material is based upon work that is supported by the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture." Grantees should follow the [USDA Visual Standards Guide](#) when using the USDA logo.
- Grant recipients *may* be asked to host USDA officials for a site visit during the course of their grant award. All costs associated with the site visit will be paid for by USDA and are not expected to be included in grant budgets.

4. Application and Submission Information

Content and Form of Application Submission

FNS strongly encourages eligible applicants interested in applying to this program to adhere to the following applicant format. The proposed project plan should be presented on 8 ½" x 11" white paper with at least 1-inch margins on the top and bottom. All pages should be single-spaced in 12-point font. The project description with relevant information should be capture on no

more than 25 pages, not including the cover sheet, table of content, resumes, letter(s) of commitment, endorsement letter(s), budget narrative(s), appendices, and required forms. All pages, excluding form pages must be numbered.

Special Instructions:

- Late application submission will not be considered in this competition. FNS will not consider additions or revisions to applications unless they are submitted via Grants.gov by the deadline. No additions or revisions will be accepted after the deadline.
- Letters of support must be submitted with the application through grants.gov. Letters submitted via email will not be considered.
- Applications submitted without the required supporting documents, forms, certification will not be considered.
- Applications missing a written proposal or budget narrative will not be considered and deemed INELIGIBLE.
- FNS reserves the right to request clarification on any application submitted in response to this solicitation.
- Applications not submitted via Grants.gov will not be considered.
- If multiple application packages are submitted through Grants.gov by the same applicant in response to this solicitation, FNS will accept the latest application package successfully submitted. All other packages submitted by the applicant will be removed from this competition.

Applicants must demonstrate the following program specific requirements in their proposals and include a crosswalk that explicitly indicates how the proposal will achieve each requirement:

1. Program Description: Comprehensive plan with descriptive details on how the applicant proposes to accomplish all three required activities (In the proposal, applicants must meet the requirements as described in Section I - Program Description & Objectives, Program Description, Activities 1 through 4 of this RFA.):
 - Activity 1: Review Evidence
 - Activity 2: Subgrants
 - Activity 3: TA and Evaluation
 - Activity 4: Synthesis and Dissemination
2. Applicant staff, collaborator, or subcontractor knowledge, experience, and/or capacity:
 - a. Designing, implementing, and coordinating a competitive RFP process that solicits proposals from WIC State and/or local agencies. All applicants must clearly articulate an administration plan for awarding competitive subgrants.
 - b. Conducting high-quality evaluations in partnership with WIC or similar public health agencies, as evidenced by reports, publications, and/or other materials (while an evaluation plan is not required at the proposal stage, the Grantee will be required to submit a formal evaluation plan to FNS once competitive sub-grants are awarded).
 - c. Experience analyzing WIC or other public health data.
 - d. Knowledge of maternal health and issues related to maternal morbidity and mortality among WIC eligible populations.

- e. Experience with and/or capacity providing high-quality technical assistance to WIC State and local agencies.
 - f. Expertise and past successful performance disseminating findings to interested parties including by not limited to policy officials, State and local agencies and their staff, WIC-eligible populations, and academic researchers.
 - g. Inclusion of subject matter experts on WIC, maternal health, and implementation science, including how subject matter experts should be consulted in the design of evaluation strategies, training and supporting staff, engagement or recruitment materials, and the like.
3. Description of how the applicant envisions collaboratively working with FNS during the cooperative agreement's period of performance including willingness to (1) collaborate with FNS and FNS-sponsored contractors on an as-needed basis to clarify work being accomplished through this project, and (2) participate in any FNS-sponsored research and evaluation efforts related to maternal health.
4. Description of the expected set of intermediate and final deliverables that will be submitted by the Grantee during and at the end of the cooperative agreement. All reports or products generated by efforts funded through this cooperative agreement are subject to review by FNS before publication, including review of final reports before submission. This includes review of manuscripts (with inclusion of the FNS point-of-contact as a co-author where appropriate based on authorship guidelines) before submission to peer-review for scientific journals, communications materials meant for general and WIC audiences about the research, and other items.
5. Description of a clear timeline for carrying out all proposed activities and demonstration of evidence of planning to meet other requirements as specified in this RFA.

Cover Sheet

The cover page should include, at a minimum:

- Applicant's name and mailing address
- Primary contact's name, job title, mailing address, phone number and e-mail address
- Grant program title and subprogram title (if applicable)

Table of Contents

The Table of Contents should include relevant sections, subsections and associated page numbers.

Application Project Summary

The application should clearly describe the proposed project activities and anticipated outcomes that would result if the proposal were to be funded.

Project Narrative

The project narrative should clearly identify what the applicant is proposing and how it will address a solution, the expected results and/or benefits once the solution is achieved, and how it will meet the RFA program scope and objectives. The proposed project methodology should

describe the project design, address program specific methodology needs, procedures, timetables, monitoring/oversight, and the organization's project staffing.

In preparing the narrative, provide the following information requested, in the order presented below:

- **Introduction/Background:** Provide background information that demonstrates the proposed team's understanding of the WIC program, WIC service delivery operations, maternal morbidity and mortality; interventions to address maternal health; and implementation science. Include information about experience and plans for administering a competitive subgrant award system for WIC State and local agencies to test the implementation of evidence-based interventions, identified by the grantee, to address early warning signs of maternal morbidity and mortality. Please note any successes, lessons learned, and challenges from previous research and evaluation efforts. Provide an overview of the plan for the project and major qualifications. Demonstrate understanding of the project requirements and considerations.
- **Objectives, Activities, and Timeline:** Clearly state project objectives, use descriptive statements that specifically discuss what the project team hopes to accomplish, and include specific activities and deadlines that accomplish all project objectives and activities. All objectives should lead to a clearly stated goal of this RFA, and the proposal should include a logic model showing how objectives and goals will be accomplished. The project timeline should start on the award date and end no more than 60 months later. Include a timeline with specific activities that will contribute to accomplishing the project objectives. The timeline should realistically estimate FNS review and approval timelines. For planning purposes, use the date of award as planned and include dates for important project milestones and deadlines and include dates for items described in the Key Objectives, Purpose of Cooperative Agreement, and Program Specific Requirements sections of this RFA.
- **Program Administration:** Describe a plan to develop and administer all aspects of the project.
 - *Evidence Review:* The project narrative should clearly identify strategies to conduct a thorough and comprehensive review of potential interventions, including how the applicant will identify and evaluate interventions and how experts (e.g., academic, experiential including WIC staff and participants) will be involved in the identification and evaluation of potential interventions.
 - *Subgrants:* The applicant should propose a detailed approach for the competitive subgrant RFA process including how it will develop, including development of the solicitation including review and approval by FNS, disseminate, and promote the subgrant opportunity; and how the applicant plans to evaluate and select subgrant proposals submitted by WIC State and local agencies. If the applicant is proposing multiple rounds of subgrants, this section should include a clear explanation of how many rounds of subgrants and justify the approach.
 - *Technical Assistance:* Describe capacity and approach to provide pre-application technical assistance for WIC State and local agencies wishing to apply for subgrants, with a specific focus on WIC State and local agencies in under resourced areas and those serving populations with the highest risk of maternal morbidity and mortality. The applicant should also describe how they will provide post-award technical assistance for subgrantees, create meaningful partnerships, evaluate program outcomes, report on outcomes related to subgrant projects,

develop resources based on lessons learned from the work completed under this RFA, and disseminate best practices. Indicate the process, frequency, and mode by which the Grantee will interact with interested subgrantee applicants wishing to apply for subgrants during the pre-application period and to subgrantees (both individually and as a group) to provide assistance. Indicate how potential subgrantees (during pre-application) wishing to apply and subgrantees (after award) will be able to request assistance and how requests for assistance will be managed by the Grantee in collaboration with the FNS's Office of Policy Support. If appropriate, describe how the applicant will facilitate shared learning among subgrantee applicants to enhance implementation and evaluation of subgrantee interventions (e.g., pooling data, implementation research designs with comparison populations, developing communities of practice, establishing a virtual space for shared resources). The plan should describe the personnel that will perform this function, as well as a process to document and track technical assistance and mentoring interactions. Applicants should articulate a clear plan to communicate the RFA requirements, prior to award, to interested WIC State agencies through webinars and other innovative outreach strategies.

- *Evaluation*: Applicants should include a detailed description of their evaluation plan(s) including supporting individual subgrant evaluations and synthesizing findings across projects to create shared meaning and identify contextual factors that contributed to the success, or remaining gaps to success, of each intervention.
- *Dissemination*: Describe plans for disseminating findings from this grant, including plans to conduct dissemination to a broad set of audiences, including FNS, WIC State and local agencies, academic communities, and the public at large. Include plans for compiling and maintaining data and other project materials. Proposals should include a clear plan for disseminating best practices and details about implementing successful interventions in WIC settings to FNS and WIC State and local agencies.
- *Management*: Provide a clear description of the activities to be undertaken to manage the project to ensure that project activities are completed on time, within budget, and with quality results. Provide a clear description of how funds will be administered and distributed to subgrantees. Describe how administrative procedures; staffing; accounting activities, and quality assurance including data quality assurance procedures, data security and privacy controls, and recordkeeping will be executed.
- *Staffing*: Describe the organizational structure and identify the key personnel who will manage the project. Describe roles and responsibilities of these individuals, as well as their relevant qualifications, expertise, and experience, and a level of effort specified for specific staff proposed. Explain contingency plans for staff turnover.
- *Resumes/CVs (this portion will not be considered in the 25-page limit)*: To assist reviewers in assessing the competence and experience of the proposed project staff, include a resume or curriculum vitae of the key personnel expected to work on the project.

NOTE FOR TIMELINES: Reports & Products Review

All reports or products generated by efforts funded through this Cooperative Agreement are subject to review by FNS before publication. This includes review of manuscripts (with inclusion of the FNS point-of-contact as a co-author where appropriate based on authorship guidelines) before submission to peer-review for scientific journals, communications materials meant for general and WIC audiences about the research, and other items. Project timelines should factor in

review of reports and products by FNS, with 3 weeks for items 20 pages or less, and 6 weeks for items greater than 20 pages in length.

Activities/Indicators Tracker

Proposed Activities and indicators measuring success must be mapped to Program Objectives (as described in Section 1 – Program Description) in the below format (note that additional Activities/Indicators can be added as needed).

Note: Indicators are defined as any metric you anticipate will be able to be tracked during the period of performance of the grant. Common examples include Number of People Attended, Number of People Impacted, Number of Conferences Delivered, Number of Materials Created, Number of Trainings, Number of People Trained.

Example

Objective # 4	Develop and implement a framework to synthesize findings across subgrant studies and broadly disseminate findings
Activity	Peer reviewed publications describing synthesis of implementation studies
Indicator(s)	Number of publications and quality of journal(s) (impact factor)
Activity	Podcast episodes developed and disseminated to highlight innovative implementation and intervention success stories
Indicator(s)	Number of podcast episodes developed; Number of unique downloads

Objective #	
Activity	
Indicator(s)	

Objective #	
Activity	
Indicator(s)	

Application Budget Narrative

The budget narrative, formatted as a table, should correspond with the proposed project narrative and application budget. The narrative must justify and support the bona fide needs of the budget's direct cost. The budget and budget narrative must be in line with the proposed project description. If the budget includes indirect costs, the applicant must provide a copy of its most recently approved Federal indirect cost rate agreement. Budget categories in this table must match those listed on the SF-424A form. If the budget table is created in a spreadsheet, it must be formatted to fit on an 8.5 x 11-inch page, with a font no smaller than 11-point Times New Roman. All funding requests must be in whole dollars.

Indirect Cost Rate

A current **Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA)**, negotiated with a cognizant Federal agency, should be used to charge indirect costs. Indirect costs may not exceed the negotiated rate. If a NICRA is used, the percentage and base should be indicated. If the applicant does not have, and has never been approved for, a NICRA, they may charge up to 10% de minimis. In this instance, the applicant must indicate they are requesting the de minimis

rate. 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 stated in the budget narrative. For questions related to the indirect cost rate, please work with the Grant Officer as noted in Section 7 of this RFA.

Note: Each organization is assigned to a single federal agency (by the Office of Management and Budget) that acts on behalf of all federal agencies in indirect cost rate negotiations and is referred to as the “cognizant agency.”

Required Grant Application Forms

The required grants.gov forms may be previewed at grants.gov/web/grants/forms/forms-repository.html. These forms are part of the grants.gov Workspace application.

- Non-Construction Grant Projects Forms: SF-424 Family
 - Application and Instruction for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
 - Budget Information and Instructions (SF-424A)
 - Assurance-Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)
- SF LLL (Disclosure of Lobbying Activities)
 - Indicate on your form whether your organization intends to conduct lobbying activities. If your organization does not intend to lobby, write “Not Applicable” in boxes required to be completed.
- Additional Required Forms and Information
 - Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number. Please see below for further information
 - SAM registration. Please see below for further information.

Letter of Intent

The eligible applicant who intends to apply may submit a Letter of Intent notice by December 15, 2023. This notice does not obligate the applicant to submit an application but provides FNS with useful information in preparing for the review and selection process. The notice should include the potential applicant’s name and address, organizations’ name, telephone number, and email address of the primary point of contact. The applicant can send the letter via email to the FNS Grant Officer identified in Section 7 of this RFA.

Submission Date

Complete grant applications must be uploaded to grants.gov by 11:59 PM EST on the due date listed on the cover page.

- Applications must be submitted via grants.gov. Mailed, emailed, or hand-delivered application packages will not be accepted. For further instructions, see the “Preparing for Electronic Application Submission through Grants.gov” below.
- Late or incomplete applications will not be considered.
- FNS will not consider additions or revisions to applications unless they are submitted via grants.gov by the deadline. No additions or revisions will be accepted after the deadline.
- If multiple application packages are submitted through grants.gov by the same applicant in response to this solicitation, FNS will accept the latest application package successfully submitted. All other packages submitted by the applicant will be removed from this competition.

FNS strongly encourages applicants to begin the registration process at least **four weeks** before the due date and to submit applications to grants.gov at least **one week** before the deadline to allow time to troubleshoot any issues should they arise. Please note that upon submission, grants.gov may send multiple confirmation notices. Applicants should ensure receipt of confirmation that the application was **accepted**.

FNS will not accept applications outside of grants.gov. Applicants experiencing difficulty submitting applications through grants.gov should contact applicant support via the toll-free number 1-800-518-4726 and email at support@grants.gov. This service is available 24/7.

Preparing for Electronic Application Submission through Grants.gov

Applicants must register with grants.gov and [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) in order to submit an application to FNS via grants.gov as required.

In order to submit an application, you must:

1. Obtain a UEI number

What is a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)?

A UEI is a unique number assigned to all entities (public and private companies, individuals, institutions, or organizations) who register to do business with the federal government. For more information, visit the [U.S. General Services Administration website](https://www.gsa.gov/transaction/unique-entity-identifier).

Where do I go to learn more about the UEI?

The U.S. General Services Administration [Unique Entity Identifier Update page](https://www.gsa.gov/transaction/unique-entity-identifier) contains the most up-to-date information about the UEI.

Note: After April 4, 2022, entities can register in SAM.gov and will be assigned their “SAM UEI.” They will no longer obtain or use a “DUNS UEI” for entity registration or reporting. For additional information on the UEI process, please visit [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov).

2. Register in the System for Award Management (SAM)

- SAM combines federal procurement systems and the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance into one system. Visit [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) for additional information.
- To register, you must have your organization’s UEI, the organization’s Tax ID Number (TIN), and taxpayer name (as it appears on the last tax return). It may take up to 5 to 7 business days or more to register and/or complete the migration of permissions and/or the renewal of an entity record.
- All applicants must have current SAM status at the time of application submission and throughout the duration of a Federal Award in accordance with 2 CFR Part 25.
- FNS strongly encourages applicants to begin this process at least **3 weeks** before the due date of the grant solicitation.

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 Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) to complete this

process. For more detailed instruction about creating a profile on grants.gov, visit grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration.html.

How to Submit an Application via Grants.gov

Applicants must apply online using [Workspace](#). *Workspace* is a shared, online environment where members of a grant team may simultaneously access and edit different web forms within an application. For each funding opportunity announcement or RFA, you can create individual instances of a workspace.

For additional training resources, including video tutorials, visit grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-training.html.

Applicant Support: Grants.gov provides applicants 24/7 support via the toll-free number 1-800-518-4726 and email at support@grants.gov. If you are experiencing difficulties with your submission, it is best to contact grants.gov support and get a ticket number. The Support Center ticket number will assist the Center with tracking your issue.

For questions related to the specific grant opportunity, please contact the Grant Officer noted in Section 7 – Federal Awarding Agency Contacts of this RFA.

NOTICE: Special Characters and Naming Conventions

All applicants **must** follow grants.gov guidance on file naming conventions. To avoid submission issues, please follow the guidance provided by grants.gov (per the grants.gov Frequently Asked Questions or FAQ).

Are there restrictions on file names for any attachment I include with my application package?

File attachment names longer than approximately 50 characters can cause problems processing packages. Please limit file attachment names. Also, do not use any special characters (e.g., ! @ # \$ % ^ & * - '). This includes periods (.) and spacing followed by a dash in the file. To separate words in naming a file, use underscore (_). For example, Attached_File.pdf.

If these guidelines for file names are not followed, your application will be rejected. FNS will not accept any application rejected from the grants.gov portal due to incorrect naming conventions.

Additional information can be found at grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-faqs.html#attachments.

Grants.gov Receipt Requirements and Proof of Timely Submission

All applications must be received by 11:59 PM EST on the due date listed on the cover page, as detailed in Section 4 – Submission Date. Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by grants.gov. An electronic date/time stamp is generated within the system when the application is successfully received by grants.gov. The applicant Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) will receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (e.g., GRANTXXXXXXXX) from grants.gov with the successful transmission of their application. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/time stamp and a grants.gov tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

When FNS successfully retrieves the application from grants.gov and acknowledges the download of submissions, grants.gov will provide an electronic acknowledgement of receipt of the application to the email address of the applicant with the AOR role. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that grants.gov receives your application. Applications received by grants.gov after the established due date for the program will be considered late and will not be considered for FNS funding.

Applicants using slow internet, such as dial-up connections, should be aware that transmission could take some time before grants.gov receives your application. Again, grants.gov will provide either an error or a successfully received transmission in the form of an email sent to the applicant with the AOR role. The grants.gov Support Center reports that some applicants end the transmission because they think that nothing is occurring during the transmission process. Please be patient and give the system time to process the application.

Intergovernmental Review

This funding opportunity is subject to the requirements of EO 12372, “Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.” This Executive Order was issued with the desire to foster the intergovernmental partnership and strengthen federalism by relying on State and local processes for the coordination and review of proposed federal financial assistance and direct federal development. The Order allows each State to designate an entity to perform this function.

If you are located within a State that does not have a Single Point of Contact (SPOC), you may send application materials directly to a federal awarding agency.

For a list of State agency contacts, please visit [whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.pdf).

Funding Restrictions

- Pre-award costs will not be permitted for this cooperative agreement.

5. Application Review Information

Review Criteria

FNS will pre-screen all applications to ensure the applicants are eligible entities and are in compliance with all Program regulations. FNS will not approve any waivers from Program regulations for any projects submitted in response to this solicitation.

Complete applications will need to be submitted by eligible applicants, meet all other eligibility requirements stated in the RFA, submitted on or before the required deadlines and be in the required format. If an application does not include all appropriate information, FNS will consider the application to be non-responsive and will eliminate it from further consideration.

The Project Narrative should demonstrate knowledge of WIC; medical, social, and environmental factors contributing to maternal morbidity and mortality; and the landscape of factors

contributing to disparities in maternal morbidity and mortality in the United States. This knowledge will be demonstrated through citing peer-reviewed literature on these subjects as well as local, State, or national reports of analysis or projects, and referencing prior work done by the applicant regarding these topics and the approaches described above, particularly the dissemination and implementation methodology required to complete the work of this program. The recipient of the award will also understand WIC services and participant experiences, which should be clearly demonstrated in the application. All applicants will be notified whether their proposal has been accepted for an award by FNS

The following selection criteria will be used to evaluate applications for this RFA.

Equity Focus (10 points)

- The applicant provides a clear and data driven understanding of health disparities related to maternal health.
- The applicant describes an approach to the subgrant RFA process including how the applicant will consider distribution of subgrant the opportunity to WIC SAs and LAs in under resourced areas, serving individuals at high risk of maternal health complications, and those in areas with high levels of maternal health disparities.
- The applicant describes an approach to the evidence review that includes an approach to evaluating equity and the appropriateness of interventions for different WIC populations, given the populations evaluated in the evidence-building process.
- The applicant's proposal includes approaches that integrate interested party (e.g., WIC agency staff, WIC participants, individuals with diverse identities) engagement in the identification and selection of possible interventions, the development of research plans, and the evaluation and dissemination processes.

Methodology (50 points)

Evidence Review (10 points)

- The applicant demonstrates a clear understanding of the current state of maternal morbidity and mortality in the US, including the impact of health disparities based on race and ethnicity and the historic and current contexts contributing to inequitable outcomes.
- The applicant includes a rigorous plan to conduct a comprehensive review of potential interventions including a search strategy, framework for evaluation, and proposed information extraction.
- The applicant clearly describes intervention elements or characteristics pertinent to the WIC program including a description of how the applicant will determine whether an intervention is appropriate for testing in a WIC setting.
- The applicant has clearly described how they plan to assess interventions for appropriateness, given the diversity of WIC service delivery modalities (e.g., in-person, remote, hybrid), WIC program settings (e.g., urban, rural, tribal, territory), and populations (e.g., pregnant, post-partum; diversity of race, ethnicity, age, language and other dimensions of identity).
- The applicant has a firm understanding of dissemination and implementation science and includes a plan with high probability of success for identifying evidence-based interventions that are appropriate for tailoring and testing in WIC settings.

Subgrants (15 points)

- The applicant proposes an administration plan for executing the competitive subgrant RFA process, including but not limited to proposed approach to provide special consideration to proposals that support WIC SAs and LAs in under resourced areas, serving participants with high risk for maternal health complications, and includes diverse identities.
- The applicant's proposal describes past success administering subgrants to WIC State agencies, or similar organizations. Description of past success should include tangible metrics for administering, monitoring, and evaluating subgrant programs.
- The applicant's plan details experience collaborating with program personnel including but not limited to relevant agencies, community-based organizations, and impacted individuals.
- The applicant's plan includes approaches to disseminate and promote information about the subgrant opportunity to WIC SAs and LAs, including approaches to promote and support SAs and LAs in under resourced areas, serving individuals at high risk of maternal health complications, and those in areas with high levels of maternal health disparities.
- The applicant's plan includes a description of and evidence of previous experience drafting, disseminating, and executing a successful subgrant process.
- The applicant's proposal outlines the criteria to be used to select subgrantee applicants.
- The applicant's plan includes a description of and evidence of previous experience.

Technical Assistance and Evaluation (15 points)

- The applicant includes a comprehensive plan for offering pre- and post-award technical assistance and includes examples of successfully providing technical assistance to WIC SAs and LAs (or similar organizations) in the past.
- The applicant proposes a comprehensive approach to providing technical support to subgrantees that includes making meaningful connections between subgrantees to enhance learning, improve research methodology through partnership, and quickly share learning throughout the process.
- The applicant describes abundant and relevant evaluation experience, skills in designing and carrying out program evaluations, experience collaborating with program practitioners.
- The applicant's proposed approach to designing evaluations of sub-grantee interventions demonstrates familiarity with common challenges specific to WIC.
- The applicant's proposed evaluation design includes specification of main research questions, hypothesis, and outcome measures of interest, approach to data collection, sample size specifications and associated justification, and analysis plans.
- The applicant's evaluation plans include realistic measures that will allow the primary grantee to continually evaluate implementation fidelity and success.

Dissemination (10 points)

- The applicant's mechanisms for communicating findings from subgrantee studies with a broad audience including but not limited to USDA, WIC SAs and LAS (both participating in and not participating in the subgrant process), researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and participants demonstrates an understanding of satisfying users' needs.
- The applicant includes a clear and creative plan for dissemination of analyses and findings of subgrantee research projects to interested parties. Dissemination may occur through creative use of web-based technologies and various media, including newsletters, working papers, special reports, podcasts, social media, infographics, and webinars to appropriate research, policy, and program audiences.

- The applicant includes a clear description of how they will make information about successful subgrantee interventions available and accessible to the broader WIC SA and LA audience including what tools will be developed to support future implementation and maintenance of successful interventions.

Evaluation Measures (15 points)

- The extent to which the application demonstrates appropriate strength and effectiveness of the method proposed to monitor and evaluate the project results within the context of implementation science.
- The extent to which the application demonstration evidence that the evaluative measures will be able to assess: 1) to what extent the program objectives have been met, and 2) to what extent these can be attributed to the project.
- The extent to which the application demonstrates a commitment to utilizing performance indicators to contribute to continuous quality improvement through regular monitoring of processes and progress toward meeting goals, objectives, and development of products.

Staffing and Organizational Preparedness (10 points)

- The applicant's proposed Director (lead investigator) and staff demonstrate appropriate levels of implementation and evaluation experience, knowledge of the WIC program, administrative skills, public administration experience, and relevant technical expertise.
- The applicant demonstrates an adequate level of Director and staff time commitments to the project.
- The applicant demonstrates an ability to work in collaboration with other scholars and practitioners in search of similar goals.
- The applicant demonstrates the nature and extent of the organization's support for evaluation and disseminating information related to the central priorities of the grant.
- The applicant demonstrates the commitment of the organization and proposed institutional unit that will support the cooperative agreement to support the project's four major objectives and activities.
- The applicant's organization demonstrates a history of high-quality and rigorous research focused on WIC through personnel with a record of substantial extramural funding for research projects and a record of publication in peer-reviewed research journals and/or government reports.

Budget and Resource Allocation (15 points)

Budgets will be reviewed for overall appropriateness, adequacy, and for the allocation of resources across administrative, research, and other areas.

- The applicant should provide a budget that yields an efficient and effective allocation of funds to achieve the objectives of this announcement (i.e., evidence review, granting subawards, providing comprehensive pre- and post-award TA, evaluation, and disseminating information, as well as core administrative functions necessary to carry out the project's goal).
- The application includes a narrative description and justification for proposed budget line items and demonstrates that the project's costs are adequate, reasonable, and necessary for the activities or personnel to be supported.
- The budget and narrative demonstrate a clear relationship to the approach.
- The applicant demonstrates the manner in which funds will be allocated to best serve the program's goal to provide financial support for research, including, but not necessarily

limited to, the level of indirect costs (1) charged by the primary grantee and (2) allowed to the sub-awardees and, if appropriate, their collaborating institutes.

Bonus Points

- BONUS POINTS (up to 5) will be awarded to Applicants working at or directly with programs at Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).²²

Total Points Available: 105 (Up to 100 review points possible; up to 5 bonus points possible)

Review and Selection Process

Following the initial screening process, FNS will assemble a panel group to review and determine the technical merits of each application. The panel will evaluate the proposals based on how well they address the required application components and array the applications from highest to lowest score. The panel members will recommend applications for consideration for a grant award based on the evaluation scoring. FNS may request information from the applicant not clearly addressed in their proposal. The Selecting Official reserves the right to accept the panel's recommendation or to select an application for funding out of order to meet agency priorities, program balance, geographical representation, or project diversity. FNS reserves the right to use this solicitation and competition to award additional grants in the next fiscal year should additional funds be made available.

6. Federal Award Administration Information

Federal Award Notice

The Government is not obligated to make any award as a result of this RFA. Unless an applicant receives a signed award document with terms and conditions, any contact from a FNS Grants or Program Officer should not be considered as a notice of a grant award. No pre-award or pre-agreement costs incurred prior to the effective start date are allowed unless approved and stated on FNS' signed award document (FNS-529). Only the recognized FNS authorized signature can bind the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service to the expenditure of funds related to an award's approved budget.

Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Confidentiality of an Application

When an application results in an award, it becomes a part of the record of FNS transactions, available to the public upon specific request. Information that the Secretary determines to be of a confidential, privileged, or proprietary nature will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Therefore, any information that the applicant wishes to have considered as confidential, privileged, or proprietary should be clearly marked within the application. Any application that does not result in an award will be not released to the public. An application may be withdrawn at any time prior to the final action thereon.

Safeguarding Personally Identifiable Information

²² *Ibid*

Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is any information that can be used to distinguish or trace an individual's identity, such as name, social security number, date and place of birth, mother's maiden name, or biometric records, and any other information that is linked or linkable to an individual, such as medical, educational, financial, and employment information (National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) SP 800-122, Guide to Protecting the Confidentiality of Personally Identifiable information, April 2010).

Applicants submitting applications in response to this RFA must recognize that confidentiality of PII and other sensitive data is of paramount importance to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. All federal and non-federal employees (e.g., contractors, affiliates, or partners) working for or on behalf of FNS are required to acknowledge understanding of their responsibilities and accountability for using and protecting FNS PII in accordance with the Privacy Act of 1974; Office of Management and Budget Memorandum; M-17-12, Preparing for and Responding to a Breach of Personally Identifiable Information; Circular A-130, Managing Information as a Strategic Resource; and the NIST Special Publication (SP) 800-122, Guide to Protecting the Confidentiality of Personally Identifiable Information.

By submitting an application in response to this RFA, applicants are assuring that all data exchanges conducted throughout the application submission and pre-award process (and during the performance of the grant, if awarded) will be conducted in a manner consistent with applicable Federal laws. By submitting a grant application, applicants agree to take all necessary steps to protect PII, including the following: (1) ensuring that PII and sensitive data developed, obtained or otherwise associated with USDA FNS funded grants is securely transmitted. Transmission of applications through Grants.gov is secure; (2) ensuring that PII is not transmitted to unauthorized users, and that PII and other sensitive data is not submitted via email; and (3) Data transmitted via approved file sharing services (WatchDox, ShareFile, etc.), CDs, DVDs, thumb drives, etc., must be encrypted

Privacy Policy

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service does not collect any personally identifiable information without explicit consent. To view the USDA Privacy Policy, visit: <https://www.usda.gov/privacy-policy>.

Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality of the Review Process

The agency requires all panel reviewers to sign a conflict of interest and confidentiality form to prevent any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may affect the application review and evaluation process. Names of applicants, including States and tribal governments, submitting an application will be kept confidential, except to those involved in the review process, to the extent permitted by law. In addition, the identities of the reviewers will remain confidential throughout the entire process. Therefore, the names of the reviewers will not be released to applicants.

Administrative Regulations

Federal Tax Liabilities Restrictions

None of the funds made available by this or any other Act may be used to enter into a contract, memorandum of understanding, or cooperative agreement with, make a grant to, or provide a loan or loan guarantee to, any corporation that has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed,

and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, where the awarding agency is aware of the unpaid tax liability, unless a Federal agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and has made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government.

Felony Crime Conviction Restrictions

None of the funds made available by this or any other Act may be used to enter into a contract, memorandum of understanding, or cooperative agreement with, make a grant to, or provide a loan or loan guarantee to, any corporation that was convicted of a felony criminal violation under any Federal law within the preceding 24 months, where the awarding agency is aware of the conviction, unless a Federal agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and has made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government.

Debarment and Suspension 2 CFR Part 180 and 2 CFR Part 417

A recipient chosen for an award shall comply with the non-procurement debarment and suspension common rule implementing Executive Orders (E.O.) 12549 and 12698, “Debarment and Suspension,” codified at 2 CFR Part 180 and 2 CFR Part 417. This common rule restricts sub-awards and contracts with certain parties that are debarred, suspended or otherwise excluded from or ineligible for participation in Federal assistance programs or activities. The approved grant recipient will be required to ensure that all sub-contractors and sub-grantees are neither excluded nor disqualified under the suspension and debarment rules prior to approving a sub-grant award by checking the System for Award Management (SAM) at [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov).

Universal Identifier and Central Contractor Registration 2 CFR Part 25

Requirement for System for Award Management. Unless you are exempted from this requirement under [2 CFR 25.110](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/chapter-I/part-25/subpart-B/section-25.110), you as the recipient must maintain current information in the SAM. This includes information on your immediate and highest-level owner and subsidiaries, as well as on all of your predecessors that have been awarded a Federal contract or Federal financial assistance within the last three years, if applicable, until you submit the final financial report required under this Federal award or receive the final payment, whichever is later. This requires that you review and update the information at least annually after the initial registration, and more frequently if required by changes in your information or another Federal award term.

Requirement for Unique Entity Identifier: If you are authorized to make subawards under this Federal award, you:

- Must notify potential subrecipients that no entity (see definition in paragraph C of this award term) may receive a subaward from you until the entity has provided its Unique Entity Identifier to you.
- May not make a subaward to an entity unless the entity has provided its Unique Entity Identifier to you. Subrecipients are not required to obtain an active SAM registration, but must obtain a Unique Entity Identifier.

Reporting Sub-award and Executive Compensation Information 2 CFR Part 170

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) of 2006 (Public Law 109–282), as amended by Section 6202 of Public Law 110–252, requires primary grantees of Federal grants and cooperative agreements to report information on sub-grantee obligations and executive

compensation. FFATA promotes open government by enhancing the Federal Government's accountability for its stewardship of public resources. This is accomplished by making Government information, particularly information on Federal spending, accessible to the general public.

Primary grantees, including State agencies, are required to report actions taken on or after October 1, 2010, that obligates \$25,000 or more in Federal grant funds to first-tier sub-grantees. This information must be reported in the Government-wide FFATA Sub-Award Reporting System (FSRS). In order to access FSRS a current SAM registration is required. A primary grantee and first-tier sub-grantees must also report total compensation for each of its five most-highly compensated executives. Every primary and first-tier grantee must obtain a UEI prior to being eligible to receive a grant or sub-grant award. Additional information will be provided to grant recipients upon award.

Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2009, Public Law 110-417

Section 872 of this Act requires the development and maintenance of a Federal Government information system that contains specific information on the integrity and performance of covered Federal agency contractors and grantees. The Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS) is designed to address these requirements. FAPIIS contains integrity and performance information from the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System, information from SAM.gov, and suspension and debarment information from the SAM. FNS will review and consider any information about the applicant reflected in FAPIIS when making a judgment about whether an applicant is qualified to receive an award.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests

The Freedom of Information ACT (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. 552, provides individuals with a right to access records in the possession of the Federal Government. The Government may withhold information pursuant to the nine exemptions and the three exclusions contained in the Act.

Application packages submitted in response to this grant solicitation may be subject to FOIA by requests by interested parties. In response to these requests, FNS will comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including departmental regulations.

FNS will forward a Business Submitter Notice to the requested applicant's point-of-contact. Applicants will need to review requested materials and submit and submit any recommendations within 10 days from the date of FNS notification. FNS will redact Personally Identifiable Information (PII).

For additional information on the Freedom of Information (FOIA) process, please contact the FNS Freedom of Information Act officer at FOIA@usda.gov.

USDA Non-Discrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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

Privacy Policy

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service does not collect any personal identifiable information without explicit consent. To view USDA's Privacy Policy, visit: usda.gov/privacy-policy.

Code of Federal Regulations and Other Government Requirements

This grant will be awarded and administered in accordance with the following regulations 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Subtitle A, Chapter II. Any Federal laws, regulations, or USDA directives released after this RFA is posted will be implemented as instructed.

Government-wide Regulations

- 2 CFR Part 25: "Universal Identifier and System for Award Management"
- 2 CFR Part 170: "Reporting Sub-award and Executive Compensation Information"
- 2 CFR Part 175: "Award Term for Trafficking in Persons"
- 2 CFR Part 180: "OMB Guidelines to Agencies on Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-Procurement)"
- 2 CFR Part 200: "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards"
- 2 CFR Part 400: USDA's implementing regulation of 2 CFR Part 200 "Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards"
- 2 CFR Part 415: USDA "General Program Administrative Regulations"
- 2 CFR Part 416: USDA "General Program Administrative Regulations for Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments"
- 2 CFR Part 417: USDA "Non-Procurement Debarment and Suspension"
- 2 CFR Part 418 USDA "New Restrictions on Lobbying"
- 2 CFR Part 421: USDA "Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance)"
- 7 CRR Part 16: "Equal Opportunity for Religious Organizations"
- 41 U.S.C. Section 22 "Interest of Member of Congress"
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Public access to Federal Financial Assistance records shall not be limited, except when such records must be kept confidential and would have been excepted from disclosure pursuant to the "Freedom of Information" regulation (5 U.S.C. 552)

General Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) of FNS grant awards may be obtained electronically in advance of an award. For a copy of T&Cs, please contact the Grant Officer noted in Section 7 – Federal Awarding Agency Contacts of this RFA.

Reporting Requirements

Financial Reports

The award recipient will be required to enter the SF-425 (Federal Financial Report) into the FNS Food Program Reporting System (FPRS) on a quarterly basis. In order to access FPRS, the grant recipient must obtain USDA e-Authentication, verify their identity, and submit an FNS-674 form, which will be provided by the Grant Officer to access FPRS. For additional information on FPRS, visit fprs.fns.usda.gov.

Performance Progress Reports (PPR)

Grantees will be required to submit progress reports to FNS 30 days following the end of each quarterly period using the FNS-908 PPR form that will be sent to grantees at the time of award or the initial orientation. The reports should cover the preceding period of activity. A final report identifying the accomplishments and results of the project will be due 120 days after the end date of the award.

Please note: The FNS-908 PPR form specific to this opportunity will be sent to grantees at the time of award or the initial orientation. Use of the FNS-908 PPR form for progress reports is required. Previous grantees that have not submitted reports timely will be evaluated as high risk. All activities reported on the FNS-908 must align with the required objective(s) from the “Key Objectives” Section above.

7. Federal Awarding Agency Contacts

For questions regarding this solicitation, please contact the Grant Officer.

Dawn Addison

Grant Officer, Grants and Fiscal Policy Division

U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS

Email: Dawn.Addison@usda.gov

8. Other Information

Debriefing Requests

Non-selected applicants may request a debriefing to discuss the strengths and weakness of submitted proposals. This information may be useful when preparing future grant proposals. Additional information on debriefing requests will be forwarded to non-selected applicants. FNS reserves the right to provide this debriefing orally or in written format.

Appendix

RFA Budget Narrative Checklist

FOR GRANT APPLICANT USE ONLY. DO NOT RETURN THIS FORM WITH THE APPLICATION.

This checklist will assist you in completing the budget narrative portion of the application. Please review the checklist to ensure the items below are addressed in the budget narrative.

NOTE: The budget and budget narrative, as well as forms SF-424 and SF-424A must be in line with the proposal project description (statement of work) bona fide need. FNS reserves the right to request information not clearly addressed. All funding requests must be in whole dollars.

ITEM	YES	NO
Personnel		
Did you include all key employees paid for by this grant under this heading?		
Are employees of the applicant's organization identified by name and position title?		
Did you reflect percentage of time the Project Director will devote to the project in full-time equivalents (FTE)?		
Fringe Benefits		
Did you include your organization's fringe benefit amount along with the basis for the computation?		
Did you list the type of fringe benefits to be covered with Federal funds?		
Travel		
Are travel expenses itemized? For example origination/destination points, number and purpose of trips, number of staff traveling, mode of transportation and cost of each trip.		
Are the Attendee Objectives and travel justifications included in the narrative?		
Is the basis for the lodging estimates identified in the budget? For example, include excerpt from travel regulations.		
Equipment		
Is the need for the equipment justified in the narrative?		
Are the types of equipment, unit costs, and the number of items to be purchased listed in the budget?		
Is the basis for the cost per item or other basis of computation stated in the budget?		
Supplies		
Are the types of supplies, unit costs, and the number of items to be purchased reflected in the budget?		
Is the basis for the costs per item or other basis of computation stated?		
Contractual: (FNS reserves the right to request information on all contractual awards and associated costs after the contract is awarded.)		
Has the bona fide need been clearly identified in the project description to justify the cost for a contract or sub-grant expense(s) shown on the budget?		

ITEM	YES	NO
A justification for all Sole-source contracts must be provided in the budget narrative prior to approving this identified cost.		
Other		
Consultant Services – Has the bona fide need been clearly identified in the project description to justify the cost shown on the budget? The following information must be provided in the justification: description of service, the consultant’s name and an itemized list of all direct cost and fees, number of personnel including the position title (specialty and specialized qualifications as appropriate to the costs), number of estimated hours and hourly wages per hour, and all expenses and fees directly related to the proposed services to be rendered to the project.		
For all other line items listed under the “Other” heading – List all items to be covered within “Other” along with the methodology on how the applicant derived the costs to be charged to the program.		
Indirect Costs		
Has the applicant obtained a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) from a cognizant Federal Agency? If yes, a copy of the most recent and signed negotiated rate agreement must be provided along with the application.		
2 CFR 200 allows any non-Federal entity (NFE) that has never received a negotiated indirect cost rate to charge a de Minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC), which the NFE may use indefinitely as a Federally-negotiated rate.		

FNS-906 Grant Program Accounting System & Financial Capability Questionnaire

This form is required. Please submit this questionnaire along with your applicant package.

PURPOSE

Recipients of Federal funds must maintain adequate accounting systems that meet the criteria outlined in 2 CFR §200.302 [Standards for Financial and Program Management](#). The responses to this questionnaire are used to assist in the Food and Nutrition Service Agency's (FNS) evaluation of your accounting system to ensure the adequate, appropriate, and transparent use of Federal funds. Failure to comply with the criteria outlined in the regulations above may preclude your organization from receiving an award. This form applies to FNS' competitive and noncompetitive grant programs.

ORGANIZATION INFORMATION

Legal Organization Name: _____

UEI Number: _____

Financial Stability and Quality of Management Systems

Requirement	Yes	No
1. Has your organization received a Federal award within the past 3 years?	☐	☐
2. Does your organization utilize accounting software to manage your financial records?	☐	☐
3. Does your accounting system identify the receipt and expenditure of program funds separately for each grant?	☐	☐
4. Does your organization have a dedicated individual responsible for monitoring organizational funds, such as an accountant or a finance manager?	☐	☐
5. Does your organization separate the duties for staff handling the approval of transactions and the recording and payment of funds?	☐	☐
6. Does your organization have the ability to specifically identify and allocate employee effort to an applicable program?	☐	☐
7. Does your organization have a property /inventory management system in place to track location and value of equipment purchased under the award?	☐	☐

AUDIT REPORTS AND FINDINGS		Yes	No
Requirement			
1. Has your organization been audited within the last 5 fiscal years? <i>(If the answer is "Yes" and this report was issued under the Single Audit Act please note this in the box below marked "Additional Information" and if not issued under the "Single Audit Act", please attach a copy or provide a link to the audit report in the Hyperlink space below).</i>		☐	☐
2. If your organization has been audited within the last 5 fiscal years, was there a "Qualified Opinion" or an "Adverse Opinion"?		☐	☐
3. If your organization has been audited within the last 5 fiscal years, was there a "Material Weakness" disclosed?		☐	☐
4. If your organization has been audited within the last 5 fiscal years, was there a "Significant Deficiency" disclosed?		☐	☐
Hyperlink (if available):			
Additional information including expanding on responses in previous sections:			

APPLICANT CERTIFICATION

I certify that the above information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Signature of Authorized Representative

Date

Name of Authorized
Representative:
Phone Number:
Email:

FNS-908 Performance Progress Report (PPR)

FOR REFERENCE ONLY.

Validate Form	Submit by Email	UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE Food and Nutrition Service	OMB Number: 0584-0512 Expiration Date: 7/31/2025																																																																																
PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT			Management Settings																																																																																
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The public burden statement: According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, 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 0584-0512. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 3 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, 1320 Braddock Place, 5th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314, ATTN: PRA (0584-0512*). Do not return the completed form to this address.																																																																																			
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"><tr><td colspan="2">1. Recipient Organization</td><td colspan="2">2. Program Information:</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">a. Organization Name: </td><td colspan="2">Program Area: </td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">b. Street Address: </td><td colspan="2">Federal Fiscal Year of Award: </td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">City: State: Zip: </td><td colspan="2">Program: </td></tr><tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">Tag: </td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">3. Primary POC:</td><td colspan="2">4. Federal Award Identification Number (FAIN):</td></tr><tr><td>a. First Name: </td><td>Last Name: </td><td colspan="2"> </td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">b. Title: </td><td colspan="2">5. Type of Report (Select One):</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">c. Telephone (Area Code & Number): </td><td colspan="2">☒ Quarterly ☐ Semi-Annual ☐ Final</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">d. Email Address: </td><td colspan="2">Reporting Fiscal Year: Period: </td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">6. Federal Grant Agreement Number: </td><td colspan="2">Original/Revision: </td></tr><tr><td colspan="4">7. Additional POC (Optional)</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">a. First Name: </td><td colspan="2">Last Name: </td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">b. Title: </td><td colspan="2"></td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">c. Telephone (Area Code & Number): </td><td colspan="2">d. Email Address: </td></tr><tr><td colspan="4">8. Report Submitted By:</td></tr><tr><td>a. First Name: </td><td>Last Name: </td><td colspan="2">b. Title: </td></tr><tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">9. Certification</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="2">☐ I certify by checking this box that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this report is correct and complete for performance of activities set forth in the award documents.</td></tr><tr><td colspan="4">10. Date Report Submitted: </td></tr></table>				1. Recipient Organization		2. Program Information:		a. Organization Name:		Program Area:		b. Street Address:		Federal Fiscal Year of Award:		City: State: Zip:		Program:				Tag:		3. Primary POC:		4. Federal Award Identification Number (FAIN):		a. First Name:	Last Name:			b. Title:		5. Type of Report (Select One):		c. Telephone (Area Code & Number):		☒ Quarterly ☐ Semi-Annual ☐ Final		d. Email Address:		Reporting Fiscal Year: Period:		6. Federal Grant Agreement Number:		Original/Revision:		7. Additional POC (Optional)				a. First Name:		Last Name:		b. Title:				c. Telephone (Area Code & Number):		d. Email Address:		8. Report Submitted By:				a. First Name:	Last Name:	b. Title:				9. Certification				☐ I certify by checking this box that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this report is correct and complete for performance of activities set forth in the award documents.		10. Date Report Submitted:			
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Form FNS-908 Version Number: 1.4 09-22 SBU Page 1 Electronic Form Version Designed in Adobe AEM 6.4 Version																																																																																			

Program Management Information**1. Progress Summary**

Provide summary of progress this reporting period, highlighting your greatest achievements and challenges to date in this reporting period. For challenges, how did you resolve or overcome them? (Max 2000 characters):

2. Personnel Information

a. Number of FTEs:

b. Were there any changes in key personnel? Yes No

c. If yes, please describe the changes in key personnel, including the individual leaving/joining the project as well as the name and contact information (email address, phone number, and name of organization) of the individual. Note: This information does not serve as a formal request to approve the change in key personnel. This request must be forwarded to the Grants Officer in a separate request (Max 2000 Characters):

3. Projected Amendments (Cost and No-Cost)

a. Number of amendments projected this upcoming quarter?

b. Do the projected amendment(s) require FNS approval? Yes No

c. Please describe the type of amendment(s) projected and justification for each. Note: This information does not serve as a formal request to approve amendments. This request must be forwarded to the Grants Officer in a separate request (Max 2000 characters):

4. Expenditures/Purchases:

a. Were there any significant expenditures or purchases, including any contracts entered during this reporting period? Yes No

b. If so, please describe (Max 2000 Characters):

5. Deviations (Changes this quarter outside of the agreed upon budget, timeline, or scope):

a. Have there been any deviations? Yes No b. Type: ☐ Budget ☐ Timeline ☐ Scope ☐ Other

c. Describe any deviation(s), including a justification and impacts to budget/timeline (Max 2000 characters):

d. Please describe proposed activities to mitigate the impact of the deviation(s) (Max 2000 characters):

Page 2

Program Management Information (Continued)**6. Upcoming Activities and Anticipated Changes**

a. Please describe activities planned for next quarter (Max 2000 Characters):

b. Do you anticipate any changes in your project timeline, activities or cost? Yes No

c. If yes, please explain the anticipated changes (Max 2000 Characters):

7. Final Reporting Summary (Final Reporting Period Only)

a. Are all goals and objectives completed at this time? Yes No

b. If no to answer 7a, briefly describe the goals and objectives that were not completed and why they were not completed (Max 2000 Characters):

c. Was the project budget sufficient for meeting the project goals? Yes No

d. If no to answer 7c, briefly describe why the budget was insufficient for meeting the project goals (Max 2000 Characters):

8. Additional Comments (Max 2000 Characters)

Page 3

Instructions: Complete this section by adding all Activities and Indicators as listed on your submitted proposal for each listed objective. For each reporting period, update these Activities/Indicators with the most up to date information. **Note:** Objectives will be added by FNS and should not be altered. Additionally, note that indicator values vary by Indicator Type selected.

Program Activities									
Objective 1									
- 1 +	Activity		Type	Anticipated Completion Date	Actual Completion Date	Location	Optional Beneficiaries/Audience		Topic (if training)
	Indicator Description		Indicator Type						
				Target	Actual (Cumulative)	Comments			

Add Objective
Remove Objective