

Fiscal Year 2019 Team Nutrition Training Grant for Innovative State Training Programs Request for Applications Questions and Answers

FNS has received several questions regarding the staffing requirements of the Project Director and Key Personnel, specifically around Full Time Employees (FTEs) and education requirements.

In response to these questions, each of the two Team Nutrition Training Grant Request for Applications (RFAs) were written with separate and unique requirements. Applicants should adhere to these requirements as stated. However, if applicants want to propose an alternative in their application, for the areas mentioned or in additional areas, they may do so. This is a competitive grant process, and each proposal will be evaluated and scored appropriately.

The Questions and Answers listed below are **ONLY** applicable to the **Team Nutrition Training Grants for Innovative State Training Programs Request for Applications (RFA)**.

The following topics are addressed in this document:

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General

1. Will there be any additional Team Nutrition Training Grant opportunities available for 2019?

The Team Nutrition Training Grant for Innovative State Training Programs and the Team Nutrition E-STAR Training Grants for State Agencies are the two Team Nutrition Training Grant opportunities for Fiscal Year 2019.

The Innovative State Training Grant has a three-year period of performance and the E-STAR Program Training Grant has a four-year period of performance.

2. Is the cover page included in the Introductory Materials two-page maximum?

No, the cover page is technically an attachment that is included in the 'Required Grant Application Forms' section of the application. Please refer to page 23 of the RFA.

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Personnel/Staffing

- 3. The E-STAR RFA states that the Full-time Project Director must have experience in school nutrition and training. The Innovative State Training Grant states that the Project Director must have a four-year degree in nutrition/dietetics AND experience in school nutrition. Can a substantial amount of school nutrition experience with a related degree, but not in nutrition/dietetics be acceptable for the Innovative State training grant?**

The requirements for Project Directors are stated in the RFA. Please refer to the Application Review Information Section of each RFA (State Innovations page 29 and E-STAR page 38). If applicants want to propose an alternative in their application and provide a justification in certain areas, they may do so. This is a competitive grant process, and each proposal will be evaluated and scored independently and appropriately.

- 4. We are concerned that our 1.0 FTE Social Scientist (even if split between two people) would result in funding being unused at the end of the grant period due to the amount of work and time the Project Co-Directors spend on evaluation. Due to this, can we use some of our time as Project Co-Directors to assist with evaluation tasks?**

Project Directors are welcome to help with evaluation activities; however the RFA states that the Social Scientist is required at 1.0 FTE. Two Social Scientist positions can be combined to meet this requirement.

- 5. Can part or all of the Social Scientist FTE be contracted with an external evaluator and/or evaluators within the state agency?**

Yes, a State can work with Social Scientists who are internal and/or external to the State agency. Social Scientists should meet the educational and experiential requirements identified in the RFA.

- 6. Can you provide more specifics on the documentation you need for hiring sub-contractors/consultants (e.g. anticipated contract description, competitive vs. sole source procurement documentation)?**

Applicants should follow their State's procurement procedure and include the necessary requirements as listed in the Budget section of the RFA.

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7. What do you mean by "experience in school nutrition"?

Individuals should be able to demonstrate an understanding of school nutrition programs by the background and experiences as indicated by their resume.

8. Can you confirm that the Letters of Commitment and resumes for key personnel are not included in the page limitation of 4 pages (specified on page 22 of the RFA)?

No, the letters of commitment and resumes are not included in the four-page limit of the 'Key Personnel and Staffing' section. They should be included as Appendices in the application submission. Please refer to page 15 of the RFA.

9. Do the Project Director and Social Scientist have to be identified prior to submitting the grant or can we submit a hiring plan for any potential vacancies?

Please refer to page 15 of the RFA for what must be included in a staffing plan. This should incorporate key project position(s) that must be filled during the course of the grant.

Programming

10. Could you provide an example of State-developed training programs that have been piloted or tested through formative research and developed utilizing evidence-informed practices. What evidence is needed to meet the standard of formative research and developed utilizing evidence-informed practices?

The application should demonstrate that the curriculum has been tested with the intended target audience and has been developed with principles and strategies from peer-reviewed published research. The evidence should demonstrate a reasonable expectation that the expansion of the program would yield positive results. This is a competitive grant process and applications will be judged according to the evaluation criteria. FNS is not recommending a particular State-developed training program to replicate.

11. For the Innovative State Training Programs RFA, can nutrition education and school wellness activities be incorporated under "improving student perception of school meals"?

The application must demonstrate that activities included in the piloted meal quality training curriculum are directly tied to the three stated meal quality objectives and the submitted logic model.

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12. Can we use a State partner developed and evaluated meal quality training (e.g. developed by a non-profit)?

The intent of the Innovative State Training Programs Grant is to expand State-developed training programs that have been piloted with the intended audience in their State.

13. Can we combine two evaluated trainings that address meal quality (previously implemented separately) to create one comprehensive training?

The application should demonstrate that the curriculum has been tested with the intended target audience and has been developed with principles and strategies from peer-reviewed published research. In combining separate trainings, the evidence base may not be as strong. The evidence should demonstrate a reasonable expectation that the expansion of the program would yield positive results. Proposals will be evaluated and scored independently and competitively in relationship to the “Evaluation of Grant Application Criteria” section on page 29 of the RFA.

14. In our State, two different State agencies implement Child Nutrition Programs. CACFP has piloted a culinary training with the Team Nutrition grant over the last 3 years. Can these funds be used to expand this training to schools?

The intent of the Innovative State Training Programs Grant is to expand State-developed training programs that have been piloted with the intended audience in their State. Simply transferring a CACFP culinary training to an audience of school nutrition professionals, is not an acceptable use of funds.

15. A) Do you have recommendations on existing, evaluated State-developed trainings that could be used by another State agency?

FNS is not recommending a particular State-developed training program to replicate.

B) Can Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) trainings be used with this grant?

No, ICN trainings cannot be used. The intent of the Innovative State Training Programs Grant is to expand State-developed training programs.

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16. Can grantees utilize ICN resources as part of their training for front line staff?

The intent of the Innovative State Training Programs Grant is to expand evidence-informed, State-developed training programs that have been piloted with the intended audience in their State. Implementing a training developed by the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) is not an appropriate use of funds for this grant.

17. What are the requirements of sharing trainings with other State agencies that are developed and/or implemented using Team Nutrition funding? For example, we are exploring an option to use a State-developed, evaluated curriculum that was developed by a partner organization who currently owns the curriculum, and they want to better understand how the training will be acknowledged/shared in the future.

The intent of the Innovative State Training Programs Grant is to expand State-developed training programs, so they can be used as a model for other States. If a State worked with one of their partners to develop a meal-quality training program, the application needs to include a statement that the State has ‘full ownership’ to the training curriculum and it can be freely shared nationwide with other States.

18. There are other trainings from 2017 and 2016 Team Nutrition Training Grants which we would gladly adopt and modify. However, in both cases they are still in progress and in addition, I’m not sure how willing other States would be to share their resources since we may be competing for the same grant funding for FY2019. But if a State is also planning to apply for the 2019 grant, why would that State be willing to share their tools?

If there is interest in adapting another State’s meal quality training curriculum and model, additional information could be gathered from research of the peer-reviewed literature, the FNS State Sharing Center, or by reaching out to the State directly. If a State is currently implementing or testing a curriculum or program and activities are ongoing, they are not obligated to share their materials, as their curriculum may not be final. If a State agrees to share their curriculum, program activities and evaluation tools, the application should include an agreement that clearly outlines the roles of each State, and addresses access to the training curriculum, evaluation data, and other pertinent materials.

States are not necessarily scored lower or ruled out if they are implementing the same curriculum as another State. States could propose a collaborative evaluation of the same curriculum being implemented in two States as comparative case studies. Two or more States may not submit a collaborative proposal for the FY 2019 Team Nutrition Training Grant for Innovative State Training Programs. State agencies must submit their proposals separately as each proposal will be evaluated and scored independently and competitively in relationship to the “Evaluation of Grant Application Criteria” section on page 29 of the RFA.

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- 19. One document of the E-STAR RFA (Appendix A-Comparison) states there are NO sub-grants for the STAR while the details of the Innovative State Training Program indicate there are sub-grants awarded. Could you please clarify?**

The STAR to E-STAR comparison that you are referring to only applies to the E-STAR RFA. Refer to Appendix A of the E-STAR RFA.

Sub-grants are optional, not required, for the Innovative State Training Programs and the E-STAR Training Grants.

- 20. Administration of a sub-grant has created a burden to many of our State's smaller School Food Authority (SFAs) which have fewer staff to support planning and delivering staff trainings, tasting events with students, procuring and purchasing small wares, and other SFA grant-related activities. Can sub-grants to SFAs include funds to pay personnel to help administer the sub-grant?**

Sub-grants are optional, not required. Sub-grants are intended to support the SFAs and their school nutrition professionals participation in the State-developed meal-quality training program and implementing meal quality improvement strategies at their sites. Sub-grants can be structured to support the time required to complete administrative requirements, such as coordinating and reporting, but they should not be seen as excessive.

- 21. Can we include evaluated resources, such as a marketing toolkit, as part of the meal quality curriculum?**

It is up to the applicant to determine if including the marketing toolkit component of their meal quality curriculum adds value to the application.

- 22. This grant indicates that applicants should submit an SFA MOU (Memorandum of Understanding). In our State, a MOU requires review by legal council and typically requires a signature by a Superintendent, which can take an extended period of time and may be time- prohibitive to applying for this grant. In lieu of an SFA MOU, may applicants submit an SFA Letter of Support or Letter of Intent?**

For states that have a lengthy MOU process, we will accept a letter of support from SFAs you plan to work with through the Innovative State Training Program. Please reference Attachment B for a sample MOU and the type of information that should be included. A State's grant award could be contingent upon FNS receiving MOUs from participating SFAs.

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- 23. Participation in an innovative State training program may require school nutrition staff to work beyond the number of hours allowed by their job category or union contract. May "Personnel Costs" for the grant include payment of school nutrition professionals who participate in the training program (e.g., at an hourly rate, a percentage of salary, or a stipend)?**

Yes, a stipend can be provided to school nutrition professionals to support their participation in the State-developed training program.

- 24. At the end of the grant, does the curriculum need to be professionally formatted so that it is ready for use by another State? Or, would USDA do that after the grant has ended?**

At the end of the grant, all final training curriculum and materials need to be in a format ready to share. If this will require a State to procure professional editing and design services, then those costs should be budgeted in their application.

- 25. For the curriculum, is an outline of courses with descriptions sufficient to submit or do we need to include scripts/presentations?**

Applicants should include a copy of the training curriculum and associated materials as an attachment of their grant application. Please refer to page 11 of the RFA.

- 26. What is a reasonable total percentage of SFAs to work with in a State?**

Due to the competitive nature of these grants, FNS will not be providing guidance on the percentage of SFAs to work with in a State.

- 27. What is USDA's definition of underserved? Could this be poverty? USDA FNS is particularly interested in reaching underserved areas in the State; can FNS describe how "underserved areas" will be defined and measured for the purpose of this grant?**

The term "underserved" is for the applicant to decide what it means in their State. It may have different applications for each State, such as: geography, ethnicity, urbanicity, access, or allocation of resources.

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28. Could you provide more definition around "evidence-based" and "State-developed"?

The intent of the grant for Innovative State Training Programs is to expand evidence-informed, State-developed training programs that have been piloted with the intended audience in their State. The application should demonstrate that the curriculum has been tested with the intended target audience through pilot testing or formative research (published or unpublished), and has been developed with principles and strategies from peer-reviewed published research. The evidence should demonstrate a reasonable expectation that the expansion of the program would yield positive results. This is a competitive grant process and applications will be judged according to the scoring criteria stated in the RFA.

Due to the competitive nature of these grants, FNS will not provide guidance on whether or not a State's individual training curriculum is evidence-informed.

The intent of the grant for Innovative State Training Programs is to expand State-developed training programs, so they can be used as a model for other States. If a State worked with one of their partners to develop a meal-quality training program, the application needs to include a statement that the State has 'full ownership' to the training curriculum and it can be freely shared nationwide with other States.

29. If recruiting participants is an allowable activity (p. 8, Section E, Paragraph 3), then why are MOUs for each participating site required? It is not very feasible to get MOUs for sites that may be participating, especially in Training Years Two and Three.

FNS would like to ensure that States actually have the commitment from the number of SFAs/school nutrition professionals that they have indicated in their proposal, as well as confirmation of the cost per participant provided in the application. The training approach and cost-efficiency of training are also part of the scoring criteria.

For states that have a lengthy MOU process, FNS will accept a letter of support from SFAs the State plans to work with through the Innovative State Training Program. Refer to Attachment B for a sample MOU and the type of information that should be included. A State's grant award could be contingent upon FNS receiving MOUs from participating SFAs.

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Evaluation

- 30. If the implemented trainings did not include a research-based evaluation, would this be acceptable if we created a rigorous evaluation? It's clear you are looking for established and proven programs that are evidence-based. What is difficult to determine is how founded in research must they be. Our culinary trainings have been most successful and we would tweak these existing trainings to better meet the merits of the grant (e.g. more sustainable for other State replication, targeting hard- to- reach areas etc.).**

The intent of the grant for Innovative State Training Programs is to expand evidence-informed, State-developed training programs that have been piloted with the intended audience in their State. The application should demonstrate that the curriculum has been tested with the intended target audience and/or has been developed with principles and strategies from peer-reviewed published research. The evidence should demonstrate a reasonable expectation that the expansion of the program would yield positive results. This is a competitive grant process and applications will be judged according to the "Evaluation of Grant Application Criteria" section on page 29 of the RFA.

- 31. We are considering evaluation tools and wanted to know if the Smarter Lunchrooms scorecard could be used as an evaluation tool?**

A scorecard can be used as a checklist to track implementation of various practices, such as implementing new strategies in the cafeteria from a training on school meal quality. Evaluation instruments need to actually test whether the implementation of specific practices have an impact on school meal quality or a change in behavior. Thus, the Smarter Lunchroom Scorecard is not an evaluation tool.

- 32. Will the FNS Evaluator guide the grantees the percentage of those that should be control and intervention SFA's?**

There will not be an FNS Evaluator for the Innovative State Training Programs grant. Each State will work with their Social Scientist to set up their evaluation. The RFA does not have a requirement for a percentage of control and intervention RFAs.