

Acer Access and Development Program

Fiscal Year 2026 Notice of Funding Opportunity

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-ACER-G-26-0007

Publication Date: May 22, 2026

Application Due Date: 11:59 PM Eastern Time on July 7, 2026

The deadline for submitting applications to this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) has been extended by 15 days. The deadline for submitting applications is now July 7, 2026. Changes to this extension are found on pages 4, 7, and 22.

Effective: Date 6/17/2026

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1.0 BASIC INFORMATION

Federal Agency: Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

Funding Opportunity Title: Acer Access and Development Program

Funding Opportunity Number: USDA-AMS-TM-ACER-G-26-0007

Announcement Type: Initial

Assistance Listing Number: [10.174](#)

Type of Federal Assistance: Grant Agreements will be used to provide a federal award to successful applicants.

Type of Application: *New applications* will be evaluated competitively using the selection process and evaluation criteria described in [section 6.0, Application Review Information](#).

Application Deadline: July 7, 2026, through [Grants.gov](#) at 11:59 pm Eastern Time. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered for funding.

1.1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), requests applications for the fiscal year (FY) 2026 Acer Access and Development Program (Acer Program). The purpose of this program is to support States, Tribal governments, and research institutions to promote the domestic maple syrup industry through the following activities:

- Promotion of research and education related to maple syrup production;
- Promotion of natural resource sustainability in the maple syrup industry;
- Market promotion for maple syrup and maple-sap products; and
- Encouragement of owners and operators of privately held land containing species of trees in the genus *Acer*:
 - to initiate or expand maple-sugaring activities on the land or
 - to voluntarily make the land available, including by lease or other means, for access by the public for maple-sugaring activities.

Approximately \$5.0 million is available to fund applications under this solicitation. In the FY 2025 application cycle, AMS funded 17 applications awarding a total of \$4.6 million.

This announcement identifies the eligibility criteria for Acer projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for an Acer grant. AMS will award these grants competitively to eligible applicants proposing high-quality projects that meet the purpose and requirements of the program. All applications will be reviewed using merit and evaluation procedures described in [section 6.0](#).

1.2 2026 HIGHLIGHTS AND CHANGES

Below are highlights of major changes to the program since last year.

- This Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) (formally known as a Request for Applications, or RFA) was reorganized following the recent changes to the Uniform Guidance, [Appendix I to Part 200, Title 2](#). The reorganization lists basic program information upfront and application submission requirements at the end.
- The NOFO was updated to remove the following:
 - Language encouraging applications that “...benefit smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and/or underserved communities...”
 - Language encouraging applicants to consider including goals and activities related to “reducing and stabilizing the level of heat-trapping greenhouse gases in the atmosphere or adapting to the already occurring climate change...”;
- Prior year priority areas to align with current budgetary and program requirements.
- The [AMS General Terms and Conditions \(AMS GT&C\)](#) have been updated to reflect changes to the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200) and to align with [USDA General Terms and Conditions \(USDA GT&C\)](#) for Federal Awards that were published on December 31, 2025. Both sets of General Terms and Conditions set out requirements for recipients.
 - AMS’ General Terms and Conditions provide 2 CFR Part 200 and USDA GT&C citations to ensure recipients are aware of all requirements.
- Specific AMS updates reflecting 2024 Uniform Guidance updates include those to section **6.3.1 Risk Review** of this document, **3.9 Allowable and Unallowable Cost and Activities**, and **8.1 Administrative and National Policy Requirements**, as included in the AMS and USDA T&Cs.
- This year’s applications must include a mandatory cost share from non-Federal sources in the form of cash and/or in-kind contributions equal to 25% of the amount of Federal funds being requested. See sections **2.3 Cost Sharing Requirements** and **4.5 Letters of Verification for Cost Sharing Funds** for additional guidance.

1.3 AVAILABLE FUNDING

Anticipated Available Funding: Approximately \$5.0 million. Enactment of future legislation may affect the availability or level of funding for this program. There is no commitment by USDA to fund any particular application, to guarantee minimum funding levels, or to make a specific number of awards.

Anticipated Number of Awards: Approximately 10 awards.

Cost Share Requirement: A 25% cost share of federal funds requested is required.

1.4 FEDERAL AWARD PERIOD DURATION AND SIZE

AMS expects applicants to complete their projects within the required performance period. AMS encourages applicants to use the full performance period to allow enough time to complete projects. However, a project may be completed before the scheduled performance period end date. The applicant must indicate the start date and end date on Block 17 of the SF-424 "Application for Federal Assistance."

Award size varies by project type. Applicants must not request less than or more than the respective minimum/maximum amounts. Applicants must justify the requested award funding amounts within the respective narrative and workplan sections on the [Acer Project Narrative](#).

| Project Type | Duration (Months) | Start Date | Completion Date | Minimum Award | Maximum Award |
|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| MDP* | 36 | September 30, 2026** | September 29, 2029** | \$200,000 | \$500,000 |
| PLE* | 36 | September 30, 2026** | September 29, 2029** | \$200,000 | \$500,000 |

* See section 3.4 for description. ** Dates are approximate. Start dates are set at the time of the award.

1.5 TIPS FOR APPLICANTS

- **To submit your application electronically in [Grants.gov](#), you must:**
 - Have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN);
 - Be registered in [SAM.gov](#);
 - Provide your UEI number and TIN on your application; and
 - Maintain an active and current SAM registration.
- **Allow time for Registration Completion:**
 - The organization registration process can take **as long as four weeks**.
 - Complete registration as early as possible to meet all deadlines. See [section 5.0 Submission Requirements and Deadlines](#) for more information.
- **Review of General Terms and Conditions:**
 - Review the [AMS GT&C](#) to understand allowable and unallowable costs.
 - Review the [USDA GT&C](#).
- **Ensure File Compatibility:**
 - Use the latest version of Adobe Reader that it is compatible with [Grants.gov software](#).
- **File Naming and Size:**
 - Limit file names to 50 characters or fewer.
 - Avoid special characters in file names (e.g. \$, %, &, *, Spanish "ñ", etc.).
- **Attachment Upload:**

- Use the “Add Attachments” button in Grants.gov for upload.
- Do not use the paperclip icon in Adobe Reader.
- **File Security and Formatting:**
 - Do not password-protect files.
 - Accept all tracked changes in document before submission.
- **Accurate Data Entry:**
 - Verify that your UEI number is correctly entered on the SF-424 form cover page.
- **Grants.gov Resources for Support:**
 - [Applicant FAQs](#)
 - [Workspace Overview](#)

By following these steps and recommendations, applicants can reduce errors, meet deadlines, and ensure compliance with submission requirements.

1.6 TIMING TO OBTAIN AND SUBMIT GRANTS.GOV REQUIRED ELEMENTS

| Required Action | Timing to Obtain/Submit |
|--|--|
| AMS Deadline to receive final application and all supporting materials through Grants.Gov | July 7, 2026 – 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time |
| Obtaining Your Organization’s UEI Number (if you do not already have one) | 7-10 business days |
| Establishing an Active SAM.gov Account (if you do not already have one) | 7-10 business days |
| Obtaining a TIN/EIN (if you do not already have one) | Up to 2 weeks |
| Creating your Grants.gov profile and registering your Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) authorization | Up to 4 weeks |

1.7 AGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

1.7.1 AMS PROGRAM CONTACTS

After closely reviewing this NOFO in its entirety, applicants and other interested parties that have questions are encouraged to contact the Acer program staff by email at SAGPgrants@usda.gov.

AMS provides resources and information on the [Acer website](#) that may be helpful to applicants, including [Descriptions of Funded Projects](#), and required application forms. AMS staff are available to provide timely technical assistance related to the application process. Staff cannot provide feedback on the merits of the application.

Acer Access and Development Program
 USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service
 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
 Room 1510 South Building, Stop 0264
 Washington, DC 20250-0264

1.7.2 GRANTS.GOV QUESTIONS

All questions regarding Grants.gov technical assistance must be directed to Grants.gov's [Applicant Support Center](#). Applicants may also call the 24/7 (except federal holidays) toll-free support number 1-800-518-4726 or email support@grants.gov.

1.8 STAKEHOLDER INPUT

AMS seeks comments about this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). AMS considers comments to the extent possible when developing the next NOFO for the program. Written comments may be submitted to: AMSGrants@usda.gov. This e-mail address is intended only for receiving comments regarding this NOFO and not for requesting information or forms. In your email subject line, please state that you are commenting on the **Acer Access and Development Program NOFO**.

2.0 ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

2.1 ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants are States, Tribal governments, and research institutions from the 50 States, American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- *Research institutions* are organizations that typically conduct research with non-Federal and Federal funds, including colleges and universities, federally funded research and development centers, national user facilities, industrial laboratories, or other research institutes.

2.2 PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

Engagement with partners and collaborators strengthens Acer Access and Development Program projects. Partners and collaborators may come from private or public, for-profit or nonprofit entities. They may be subrecipients of project funding, and contractors, or may be contributing effort as an in-kind cost share or donating time to the project.

- A *partner* is in a relationship involving close cooperation with the applicant and shares responsibilities in the management of the project.
- A *collaborator* is a person or an organization that cooperates with the applicant in the conduct of the project and is not immediately connected to the management of the project.

Applicants must disclose any potential conflicts of interest to the USDA awarding agency or pass-through entity, including organizational conflicts of interest relating to relationships with a parent company, affiliate, or subsidiary organization, shared or overlapping governance structure, or other

relationship between or among the applicant and its partners and collaborators. The relationships must follow [2 CFR 400.2\(b\)](#) and may be subject to AMS review and approval. See also [2 CFR § 200.112](#).

Partners and collaborators may be private or public, for-profit, or nonprofit entities, including but not limited to:

- New and beginning farmers and ranchers (individuals or entities that have not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participate in the operation);
- Rural enterprises (small and emerging private businesses in rural areas that have fewer than 50 employees and less than \$1 million in gross revenue);
- Agri-businesses; and
- Local government entities.

Applicants are required to show evidence of existing community or industry support and engagement. Applications should demonstrate a commitment to engage potential project beneficiaries as active participants (see [section 4.6](#)).

2.3 COST SHARING REQUIREMENTS

This funding opportunity requires recipients to fund their projects, in part, with cost sharing funds from non-Federal sources in the form of cash and/or in-kind contributions equal to 25% of the amount of Federal funds being requested. If an applicant voluntarily pledges cost sharing above the required amount, the additional cost share becomes a binding requirement of the Federal award once the award is issued. There is no competitive advantage for an applicant to provide a cost share that exceeds the required amount.

Cash contributions are generally defined as actual monetary funds (not the 'value' of someone's time/effort) from the applicant's general revenue/reserves/savings/line of credit, or 3rd-party partner(s), or other non-Federal grants. The applicant must be able to track and show the source of the cost share, and that the funding source will be dedicated entirely to the grant project, and produce records to that effect (for example, taking the cash cost share in your accounting system, or from your partner, and placing it into a special 'grant project' account).

In-kind contributions are generally defined as the value of goods or services provided by the contributor for the benefit of the grant project, where no funds transferred hands. For example, a partner, such as a Tribal community member, may volunteer their professional expertise as an in-kind contribution to the project as described in [2 CFR § 200.306\(e\)](#).

Cost sharing must be in the form of allowable direct or indirect costs. Only applicants with a valid Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) can use indirect cost as a source of cost sharing (see [section 3.10.1](#)).

All cost sharing contributions **must be committed or secured** at the time an applicant is selected for an award. An award will not be issued unless all cost-sharing funds over the life of the grant are secured. Additional anticipated cost sharing funds not in place by the time the project starts **cannot be counted** toward the cost sharing requirement.

Cost share contributions (either cash or in-kind) cannot be used for this program if they are already being used toward satisfying a cost share requirement under any other Federal grant agreement.

Applicants may not use Federal funds of any kind (as defined in [2CFR § 200.306\(b\)\(5\)](#)) or program income as cost share. Program income is defined as income directly generated by a supported activity or earned as a result of the Federal award during the period of performance ([2 CFR § 200.1](#)). Unless otherwise stated in the Notice of Award (NOA) provisions section, AMS authorizes the use of program income through the additive method ([2 CFR § 200.307\(b\)\(2\)](#)). Any program income generated during the grant period must be used to further the objectives of the project and under the conditions of the award.

Applicants must indicate the total cost share amount and how it will specifically align with their requested funding when completing the fiscal plan and resources sections of the [Acer Project Narrative](#) (see [section 4.4](#)). Additionally, applicants must submit signed letter(s) verifying the cost share for EACH cash and in-kind resource (see [section 4.5](#)).

Refer to [2 CFR § 200.306](#) for additional Federal requirements and definitions, including the basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions.

3.0 PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

3.1 LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Acer Access and Development Program (Acer Program) is authorized in PL 113-79, as amended, and is codified in [7 U.S.C. § 1632c](#).

3.2 PURPOSE

The purpose of this program is to support States, Tribal governments, and research institutions to promote and strengthen the domestic maple syrup industry through the following activities:

1. Promotion of research and education related to maple syrup production;
2. Promotion of natural resource sustainability in the maple syrup industry;
3. Market promotion for maple syrup and maple-sap products;
4. Encouragement of owners and operators of privately held land containing species of trees in the genus *Acer* to:
 - a. initiate or expand maple-sugaring activities on the land; or
 - b. voluntarily make the land available, including by lease or other means, for access by the public for maple-sugaring activities.

3.3 DEFINITION OF MAPLE-SUGARING

For the purpose of this program, maple-sugaring means the collection of sap from any species of tree in the genus *Acer* for the purpose of boiling to produce food. *Acer* is a genus of trees or shrubs commonly known as maple.

3.4 PROJECT TYPES

Applicants must align their proposal to only **one** of the following two project types:

- Market Development and Promotion (MDP)
- Producer and Landowner Education (PLE)

All applications must illustrate a regional or national impact on domestic maple syrup or maple-sap products and have the potential to quantitatively increase maple-sugaring activities or maple syrup production.

3.5 MARKET DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION (MDP)

Market Development and Promotion (MDP) projects should emphasize improving consumer knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the maple syrup industry and its products. Specifically, this project type focuses on enhancing the market for domestic maple syrup and maple-sap products through consumer promotion. These include education related to maple syrup production, research, and natural resource sustainability in the maple syrup industry.

Examples Include:

- Consumer awareness campaigns promoting maple syrup and maple-sap products.
- Campaigns with producers and/or consumers that highlight and promote sustainable practices implemented by the maple syrup industry.
- Agritourism promotional activities that increase consumer awareness of maple-sugaring operations and connection to product development.
- Campaigns that foster the development of relationships between U.S. maple producers and international buyers and traders.

3.6 PRODUCER AND LANDOWNER EDUCATION (PLE)

Producer and Landowner Education (PLE) projects should emphasize improving producer knowledge, awareness, and understanding of research, educational resources, or natural resource sustainability practices affecting the maple syrup industry and its products. Specifically, this project type focuses on increasing maple syrup and maple-sap product producer knowledge and awareness of current research, educational resources, and natural resource sustainability practices that increase maple product production through increased efficiency and reduced inputs. PLE projects can also coordinate with landowners and operators of privately held land containing maple trees to initiate or expand maple-

sugaring activities on the land or to voluntarily make the land available, including by lease or other means, for access by the public for maple-sugaring activities.

Examples include:

- Education campaigns highlighting new processes, technologies, or procedures that streamline or reduce production costs of maple syrup or maple-sap products.
- Producer awareness campaigns encouraging landowners and maple syrup producers to adopt new, safer, and more efficient technologies.
- Establishing or expanding maple producer land-sourcing networks and organizations on a state, regional, or national level.
- Informational campaigns for landowners and operators of privately held land about the economic benefits of initiating or expanding maple-sugaring activities or making their land available for maple-sugaring activities.
- Campaigns that highlight the sustainability of operating maple-sugaring activities on privately held land.

3.7 PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES NOT ELIGIBLE FOR FUNDING

Projects are **not eligible** for consideration if the proposed activities:

- Are to buy land, or for construction of a building or structure.
- Are for agricultural production-related expenses, including crop production and the purchase of farm equipment, tools, materials, supplies, and other related costs ([section 3.10](#)).
- Benefit only one agricultural producer, vendor, entity, or individual. Applicants must collaborate with others to benefit the larger community.
- Depend upon the completion of another project or the receipt of another grant.
- Include legal fees and other costs associated with establishing a business or organization.
- Duplicate activities that are already funded by another Federal award program.
- Provide capital for revolving loan funds or seed equity funds.

For additional information on allowable and unallowable activities please refer to the [AMS GT&C](#) and [USDA GT&C](#). Applicants that have questions concerning the allowability of costs after reviewing these documents should contact AMS staff using the contact information listed under [1.7 Agency Contact Information](#).

3.8 PERFORMANCE MEASURES

To evaluate and report on the outcomes of the Acer program on a national scale, AMS collects information on performance measures. Each project submitted must include for at least one outcome

and at least one of the indicators under the selected outcome(s) in the Achievability section of the Project Narrative ([section 4.4](#)) or in the [Acer Performance Measures](#).

Recipients must report progress on the selected outcomes and indicators in the Annual Performance Report and provide final results in the Final Performance Report. Please refer to the [AMS Grant Performance Measures](#) webpage for more information.

3.9 ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE COST AND ACTIVITIES

All AMS awards are subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in the [AMS GT&C](#) and [USDA GT&C](#).

Applicants that have questions concerning the allowability of costs after reviewing this document should contact AMS staff using the contact information listed under [section 1.7](#).

3.10 INDIRECT COSTS

Indirect costs (also known as “facilities and administrative costs”—defined at [2 CFR § 200.1](#)) are costs, “incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.” Applicants that do not have a current NICRA may elect to charge a *de minimis* rate up to 15% of the Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC). Applicants with a NICRA must apply their approved NICRA rate. For more information on indirect costs for recipients and subrecipients, refer to section 4.5 of the [USDA GT&C](#) and [2 CFR §§ 200.413](#) and [200.414](#).

3.10.1 USING INDIRECT COST FOR COST SHARING

Applicants with a valid NICRA may use all or a portion of the indirect cost as cost share with [2 CFR 200.306\(c\)](#).

The maximum indirect costs allowed for a project may be included in different ways:

1. They can be part of the Federal portion of the project budget. For example, if the maximum indirect cost is \$8,000, the applicant can include the full amount in the Federal part of the budget.
2. Alternatively, indirect cost can be offered as an in-kind cost share contribution. For example, if the maximum indirect cost is \$8,000, the applicant can include the full amount in the In-kind Cost Share part of the budget.
3. The applicant may split the indirect cost allocation between the Federal and non-Federal portions of the budget only if the total amount of indirect costs does not exceed the maximum indirect costs allowed. For example, the applicant could include \$4,000 in the Federal budget and \$4,000 as an in-kind contribution. Alternatively, the applicant may request any other combination that, when combined, does not exceed the maximum indirect costs allowable.

Applicants that elect to use the *de minimis* indirect cost rate may *not* use indirect costs as cost share. Refer to [2 CFR §200.413](#) and [§200.414](#) for additional information on determining if costs charged to the award are direct or indirect.

3.11 SUBAWARDS

The applicant is expected to perform most of the work of the project. However, the applicant may subaward and/or contract ([2 CFR 200.331](#)) with partners, collaborators, or other parties that provide additional knowledge, expertise, or resources to complete the proposed project and that are not available within the applicant organization. In all subaward or contract scenarios, the primary applicant will maintain the oversight and reporting responsibility as the authorized organization representative. Using grant funds to competitively “re-grant” funds in mini-grant programs or to activities that are not central to the purpose of the project or for unknown costs is unallowable.

3.12 COORDINATOR MEETING TRAVEL

Recipients are expected to attend an AMS sponsored grant management meeting during the project’s period of performance. The proposed budget must include travel funds for the Project Coordinator and any key personnel as reasonably determined by the recipient and AMS.

To estimate these costs in the budget section, please account for flights, hotel, per diem, and ground transportation expenses for a 3-day, 2-night stay. Location and dates are to be determined with possibility of a virtual conference. If the conference is virtual, recipients will be able to reallocate those funds to another allowable item.

4.0 APPLICATION CONTENTS AND FORMAT

Applicants **MUST** submit the required documentation in the appropriate format as listed in this section. Applications that do not comply with the requirements may be deemed incomplete and ineligible for review.

4.1 APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Before submitting an application, applicants must read the NOFO in its entirety to fully understand the program requirements. The application checklist below provides the mandatory and, if applicable, documents for an application package.

Mandatory Documents:

- SF-424 – Application for Federal Assistance (Grants.gov)
- SF-424A – Budget Information - Non-Construction Programs (Grants.gov)
- Project Narrative Form ([section 4.4](#))
 - Must use the required template format
 - Executive Summary is no more than 250 words
 - Ensure the application excludes unallowable costs and activities per [section 3.9](#).
 - Ensure it does not exceed the page limit for the project narrative.
- Ensure the federal funds requested do not exceed the maximum or minimum award amount per [section 1.4](#).
- Signed Letter(s) of Verification for Cost Sharing Funds for each cost share resource per [section 4.5](#).

- ☐ Signed Letter(s) of Commitment from Partners and Collaborators from each partner or collaborating organization at the time of application per [section 4.6](#).

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

- ☐ NICRA (PDF Attachment) per [section 4.7](#).

AMS strongly recommends submitting applications at least **two weeks before the deadline** to allow time to address potential technical or submission issues.

4.2 SF-424 APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

Required: Form SF-424 is available via the opportunity at www.Grants.gov. Applicants may use the following supplemental instructions associated with specific blocks on the SF-424.

| Block | Instructions |
|---|--|
| 1 - Type of Submission | Select Application |
| 2 - Type of Application | Select New |
| 4 through 7 | Not required |
| 8.c - Organizational Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) | Enter applicant UEI for the organization submitting the application. The UEI must match the active registration in SAM.gov. |
| 8.d - Address | Enter the organization street address as it appears in SAM.gov. P.O. Boxes will not be accepted. Enter a 9-digit zip code |
| 10 - Name of Federal Agency | AMS, USDA |
| 11 - Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (Assistance Listing Number) | 10.174 |
| 12 - Funding Opportunity Number | USDA-AMS-TM-ACER-G-26-0007 Ensure you are applying for the correct grant program. |
| 13 - Competition Identification Number | Not applicable |
| 14 - Areas Affected by Project | Enter cities, counties, states affected by project. |
| 15 - Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project | Provide a short description of the project. |
| 16a - Congressional Districts for Applicant | Enter the Congressional district where your main office is located. |
| 16b - Congressional Districts for Program/Project | Enter the Congressional district where your project will be implemented. Write "All" if the projects will be implemented in more than one location. |
| 17 - Proposed Project Start Date and End Date | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enter start date: September 30, 2026* • Enter end date: September 29, 2029* *Dates are approximate. Start dates are set at the time of the award. |
| 18 - Estimated Funding – Federal | Enter the Total Federal award requested. |
| 18b - Estimated Funding – Applicant | Enter the Total Cost share amount. |
| 19 - Is Applicant Subject to Review by State Under Executive Order 12372 Process. | See section 5.5 Intergovernmental Review . |

4.3 SF-424A BUDGET INFORMATION FOR NON-CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMS

Required. The SF-424A is available via the application package in Grants.gov. The blocks on the required form are either self-explanatory or easily explained in the instruction of the form. However, applicants must use the following supplemental instructions associated with specific boxes on form SF-424A.

Please complete **only** Sections A, B, and C. Do **not** complete Sections D, E, F.

Section A – Budget Summary

| Box | Instructions |
|---|---|
| 1.a – Grant Program Function or Activity | Enter “ACER – Federal” |
| 1.b – Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number | Enter “10.174” |
| 1.e – Federal | Enter the total Federal funding amount requested for the project |
| 1.f – Non-Federal | Enter the total cost share contribution amount for the project |

Section B – Budget Categories

| Box | Instructions |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 6.a – 6.j – Object Class Categories | In Column 1, enter the amount of Federal funds requested for each Object Class Category. Do not include cost share funding. For example, if you are requesting \$2,000 in Federal funds for “Travel,” enter 2000 in Column 1, box 6.c |

Section C – Non-Federal Resources

| Box | Instructions |
|---------------------|--|
| 8.a – Grant Program | Should auto-populate from Section A, Box 1.a |
| 8.b – 8.d | Enter the cost share amount being provided from each source (Applicant, State, or Other) for the project |

4.4 PROJECT NARRATIVE

Required. Applicants **MUST** prepare and submit a project narrative using the [Acer Project Narrative](#) form. The form and instructions are available on the “[How to Apply](#)” webpage. The Project Narrative must clearly describe the objectives and goals, types of project activities, applicable outcome indicators, and fiscal plan and resources information.

The Project Narrative must be typed and single-spaced in an 11-point font. It **MUST** not exceed fifteen (15) 8.5 x 11 pages (excluding existing Project Narrative form content). For example, if the Project Narrative form is 15 pages before you begin entering your project information into the form, **your narrative may be up to 30 pages (15 original form pages + 15 pages of applicant content)**. **DO NOT** modify the Acer Project Narrative form. Evaluation points will be deducted if the Project Narrative form is modified. Before submitting the application to Grants.gov, please make sure no tracked changes or mark-up edits and comments are visible. Handwritten applications or applications submitted in MS Word will not be accepted.

Applicants must submit the [Acer Project Narrative](#) as a PDF and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Project Narrative Attachment Form” on the application package. Applications not submitted in the required narrative template and missing critical information will be disqualified.

The supporting documents listed in sections 4.5 through 4.7 do not count toward the 30-page limit.

4.5 LETTERS OF VERIFICATION FOR COST SHARE

Required. Applicants **MUST** provide written proof of the cost share commitments from every *party*, including the applicant, who will contribute cash or in-kind cost sharing to the project.

Submit one letter verifying the cost share for EACH cash or in-kind resource that is being contributed. The letter must be signed by the cost sharing contributor organization. For example, if the cost share contribution will be provided by the applicant organization and two partners, a total of 3 cost share verification letters are required.

AMS has posted a [Letter of Verification for Cost Share Template](#) on the grant program’s website. Applicants are strongly encouraged to use this template. If an applicant does not use this template, the cost share verification documentation must include the following:

- Project Applicant Name
- Project Title
- Cash Commitment per year (if applicable) and Total Cash Cost Share Contribution
- In-kind Contribution per year (if applicable) and Total In-kind Cost Share. Break down items into categories as applicable:
 - Salaries (employee name, title, duties, pay rate/hour, amount provided per year)
 - Items/Activities (fair market value per unit, how value determined, and amount provided per year)

- Explanation of how each type of contribution will correspond to the budget or be used by the applicant
- Signature of Organization Representative providing the cost share, with typed name and title

Instructions for organizations submitting Letter of Verification for *Cost Sharing Funds*: Submit *Letter of Verification for Cost Sharing Funds* on letterhead and address them to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top of the documents that they are “**LETTER OF VERIFICATION FOR COST SHARE.**” All letter(s) must be signed and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Add Attachments” button under Form SF-424 item #15. **AMS will not accept unsigned letters or letters emailed separately.**

4.6 LETTERS OF COMMITMENT FROM PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

Required. Applicants MUST provide letters of commitment from all project partners and collaborators at the time of the application. More information can be found on partners and collaborators in [section 2.2](#).

AMS has posted a [Letter of Commitment From Partners and Collaborators Template](#) on the grant program’s website. Applicants are strongly encouraged to use this template. If an applicant does not use this template, Letters of Commitment must include the following information:

- Project Applicant Name
- Project Title
- A brief description of the partner entity’s mission and its reason(s) for joining the project
- What the organization commits to participating in and supporting
- The time period of the partnership
- The specific role(s) and responsibilities of the participating individuals or partner organizations, as applicable, and any individual time commitment
- A statement that these individuals and the organization(s) agree to abide by the management plan contained in the application.

Instructions for organizations submitting Letters of Commitment: Submit letters on letterhead and address them to the applicant (i.e., Project Director). Clearly indicate at the top that they are “**LETTERS OF COMMITMENT.**” Letters must be signed by the partner or collaborator and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Add Attachments” button under SF-424 item #15. **AMS will not accept unsigned letters or letters emailed separately.**

PLEASE NOTE: Congressional letters of support are not required, and such letters do not carry any weight during the evaluation process.

4.7 NEGOTIATED INDIRECT COST RATE AGREEMENT (NICRA)

Required if the applicant has NICRA. Applicants must submit a copy of the current, approved NICRA. See [section 3.10](#) for more information. The NICRA must be in PDF format and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Add Attachments” button under SF-424 item #15.

5.0 SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES

5.1 ELECTRONIC APPLICATION PACKAGE

Applicants MUST apply for this program electronically via Grants.gov. No other submission method is accepted. AMS urges applicants to submit early to the Grants.gov system. The [How to Apply for Grants](#) Grants.gov webpage gives an overview of the application process. This NOFO has all the information needed to complete the required application forms and AMS-specific attachments. More information about applying through Grants.gov can be found in [section 5.2](#).

Applicants can find the opportunity under either the Assistance Listing number “**10.174**,” or the Acer Funding Opportunity Number “**USDA-AMS-TM-ACER-G-26-0007**.”

5.2 SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS

5.2.1 HOW TO REGISTER TO APPLY

Applicants MUST have a UEI, an active SAM.gov account, and a Grants.gov account to submit an application. AMS recommends that applicants start the registration process in these systems immediately to allow enough time to meet application submission deadlines. Registration in these systems collectively may in some cases take **more than four weeks** to complete. The steps below provide details on how to complete each registration.

Individual applicants eligible to apply for this grant can find complete instructions here:

<https://www.grants.gov/applicants/applicant-registration>

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:

<https://www.grants.gov/help/register/organizations>

1. Obtain [a Unique Entity Identifier \(UEI\)](#): Entities applying for funding, including renewal funding, must have a UEI from SAM.gov. Applicants must enter the UEI number in the data entry field labeled "Organizational UEI" on the SF-424. Getting a UEI requires validation steps in SAM.gov. Applicants are encouraged to start this process as early as possible, and, if applicable, this includes providing guidance to subapplicants on getting their own UEI.
2. [Register with the System for Award Management \(SAM\)](#): In addition to having a UEI number, organizations applying online through Grants.gov must register with SAM. Current SAM.gov registrants have already been assigned their UEI and can view it within SAM.gov. All organizations must register with SAM to apply online. Failure to register with SAM will prevent your organization from applying through Grants.gov. **SAM.gov accounts must be updated annually, and your organization must have an active SAM.gov account to submit your application to Grants.gov. Organizations must maintain an active SAM registration with current information throughout the application review period and, if you are awarded a grant, during the project period.**
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 UEI number to complete this process.

Completing this process automatically triggers an email request for applicant roles to the organization's E-Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC) for review. The EBiz POC is a representative from your organization who is the contact listed for SAM. To apply for grants on behalf of your organization, you will need the Authorized Organization Role (AOR).

- Watch the video on how to [Register in Grants.gov](#) and create an institutional profile. Applicants are required to use [Login.gov](#) to sign into [Grants.gov](#). See the [Grants.gov help article](#) for more information on logging in with Login.gov credentials. The Grants.gov validation process also includes a check for an active SAM.gov registration. Applicants without a current SAM.gov registration will be rejected.
4. [Authorize Grants.gov Roles](#): After creating an account on Grants.gov, the EBiz POC receives an email notifying him or her of your registration and request for roles. The EBiz POC will then log in to Grants.gov and authorize the appropriate roles, including the AOR role, thereby giving you permission to complete and submit applications on behalf of the organization. You will be able to submit your application online any time after you have been approved as an AOR.
 5. [Track Role Status](#): After registering with Grants.gov and authorizing the applicant AOR, Grants.gov allows you to track your status.
 6. [Electronic Signature](#): When applications are submitted through Grants.gov, the name of the organization's AOR who submitted the application is inserted into the signature line of the application, serving as the electronic signature. The EBiz POC must authorize individuals who are able to make legally binding commitments on behalf of the organization to act as an AOR; **this step is often missed, and it is required for valid and timely submissions.**

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

Applicants can apply using [Grants.gov 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 NOFO, an applicant creates individual instances of a workspace.

1. *Create a Workspace*: This allows you to complete your Workspace online and route it through your organization for review before submitting.
2. *Complete a Workspace*: Add participants to the workspace, complete all the required forms, and check for errors before submission.
 - *Adobe Reader*: If you decide not to apply by filling out the webforms, you can download individual PDF forms in Workspace so that they will appear similar to other Standard or AMS forms. The individual PDF forms can be downloaded and saved to your local storage device, network drive(s), or external drives, and then accessed through Adobe Reader.

NOTE: You may need to visit the [Adobe Software Compatibility page on Grants.gov](#) to download the appropriate version of the software. There is no cost for Adobe Reader Software.

- *Mandatory Fields in Forms:* Fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color are mandatory fields you must complete to successfully submit your application.
 - *Complete SF-424 Fields First:* The forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant’s name, address, and UEI number. To trigger this feature, an applicant must complete the SF-424 information first. Once it is completed, the information will transfer to the other forms.
3. *Submit via Workspace:* Submit your application through Workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab. Grants.gov recommends submitting your application package **at least 24-48 hours prior to the close date** to provide you with time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.
- SPECIAL NOTE: Grants.gov **does not** check for AMS required attachments. It is the applicant’s responsibility to ensure that all required attachments listed in [section 5.0](#) are included correctly in the application package when submitting via Grants.gov
4. *Track via a Workspace:* After successfully submitting a workspace package, Grants.gov automatically assigns a Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) to the package, which will be listed on the Confirmation page generated after submission.

Applicant Support: Grants.gov provides a [Quick Start Guide for Applicants](#) and additional [training resources, including video tutorials](#). Applicants may also call the 24/7 (except federal holidays) toll-free support number 1-800-518-4726, or email support@grants.gov. Grants.gov will issue a ticket number to which you and Grants.gov can refer if the issue is not resolved. For questions related to the specific grant opportunity, use the contact information described in [section 1.7](#).

5.3 ADDITIONAL SUBMISSION DETAILS

AMS will not consider any applications received after the deadline. In addition, AMS will not consider any applications submitted by fax, email, or postal mail, or any applications that don’t meet the requirements of this NOFO, such as not being eligible, having an incomplete application, or missing required documents, etc.). See the Late, Nonresponsive, and Incomplete Applications Policy on the [AMS Policies and Procedures](#) page for more information.

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

Grants.gov will automatically record the date and time when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant AOR will then receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/time stamp in an email as proof that the application was submitted on time.

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

5.4 SUBMISSION DATE AND TIME

Applicants **MUST** submit applications electronically via [Grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on July 7, 2026. AMS cannot consider applications received after this deadline for funding. See the Late, Nonresponsive, and Incomplete Applications Policy on the [AMS Policies and Procedures](#) page for more information.

5.5 INTERGOVERNMENTAL REVIEW

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

6.0 APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

All applications will go through a review process as described in the following subsections.

6.1 INITIAL REVIEW (INITIAL SCREENING)

Each application is initially reviewed for overall completeness, as well as compliance with eligibility and program requirements described in this NOFO. If an application does not meet these requirements, it is removed from consideration. Please see [section 5.3](#) and the Late, Nonresponsive, and Incomplete Applications Policy on the [AMS Policies and Procedures](#) page for more information.

Applications that will not be considered include, but are not limited to:

- Those from an organization that does not meet the eligibility criteria.
- Those requesting funding above the award ceiling per the funding project type.
- Those missing the required documentation.
- Those submitted after the deadline.

6.2 REVIEW CRITERIA (TECHNICAL REVIEW)

Applications that pass the initial review screening are evaluated on their overall merit by a panel of independent peer reviewers. AMS attempts to match reviewers with applications in their areas of expertise. Each reviewer signs a conflict of interest and confidentiality agreement regarding any

assigned applications. Peer review panels evaluate assigned applications using instructions prepared by AMS officials. Individual reviewers score applications and discuss as panel members to arrive at a consensus score. AMS then uses the scores as the basis for selecting applications that will go to administrative review.

Each application that meets the initial qualifications screening requirements will be reviewed and scored competitively using the criteria listed below.

Alignment and Intent **25 Points**

1. The application provides a clear and concise description of the specific issue, problem, or need addressed by the project and its objectives with all written instructions and requirements described within the NOFO and Project Narrative.
2. The application demonstrates how the project addresses an important marketing barrier, challenge, or opportunity, and aligns with the Acer Program’s legislative and program goals.
3. The application clearly indicates how it will engage with intended beneficiaries, including number of beneficiaries and how they will benefit. The application demonstrates a commitment to engage potential project beneficiaries as active participants in partnerships activities.
4. The application describes the project’s proposed geographic focus area and why it is the most appropriate place to conduct project activities.
5. The application complies with all written instructions and requirements described within the NOFO and Project Narrative Template.

Technical Merit **25 Points**

1. The application presents a clear, well-conceived, and suitable work plan that includes measurable and quantifiable tasks directly tied to the goals and objectives of the proposed project.
2. The application presents a realistic schedule for implementing activities within the proposed award project period.
3. If the project or entity was previously funded, the extent to which the previous lessons learned are incorporated into the proposed project.
4. The application clearly identifies technical resources, expertise, and partners’ contributions that will support project’s development, implementation, and/or management; this includes the planning, conduct, and desired outcomes for training and technical assistance.

Achievability **15 Points**

1. The application demonstrated that the outcomes and indicator(s) are realistic and measurable for the scale and scope of the project and aligned with the project goals, including:
 - a. How target indicator numbers were derived, including a clear plan for collecting data and feedback to evaluate and achieve each relevant outcome indicator.

- b. Key factors predicted to contribute to or restrict progress toward the indicators, including action steps for addressing restrictive factors.
 - c. Overall viability of outcomes and indicators to ensure that they are meaningful, accessible, and can be applied and evaluated.
2. The project design can reasonably be replicated to other regions, communities, and/or agricultural systems.
 3. The application provides a comprehensive plan to share the project’s results (both positive and negative) electronically and in person to target audiences, stakeholders, and interested parties.

Expertise and Partners **25 Points**

1. The application includes substantial, effective, varied, and strong qualifications of the applicant and relevant partnerships and collaborators to accomplish the project’s goal and objectives and to meet the needs of the intended beneficiaries including:
 - a. Commitment from the key partners and/or collaborators to achieve project goals and outcomes, as demonstrated through their Letters of Commitment from Partners and Collaborators.
 - b. Names and titles of key staff who will be responsible for managing the project and individuals who comprise the Project Team.
 - c. The project team demonstrates expertise and experience necessary to successfully manage and implement the proposed project.
2. The application describes a clear management plan for coordination, communication, data sharing, managing conflict of interest, and reporting among members of the Project Team and stakeholder groups, both internally for the applicant personnel **and** externally for partners and collaborators.
3. The application describes a commitment to collaboration and engagement among partners to ensure high levels of participation or provides a clear and concise plan for how such engagement will occur.
4. The application describes how the project’s partnerships and collaborations will be sustained beyond the project’s period, such as strategies for maintaining and leveraging additional resources (i.e. without grant funds).

Fiscal Plan and Resources **10 Points**

1. The application Budget Narrative/Justification provides a clear, detailed description for each budget line item including:
 - a. How the budget is reasonable and proportional to the size and scope of the project; and
 - b. How each cost item directly supports and aligns with activities and outcomes described in the narrative.
2. The budget and justification relate logically to the Project Narrative describing the project.

3. The application provides evidence that critical resources and infrastructure that are necessary for the initiation and completion of the proposed project that are currently in place.
4. The applicant demonstrates its contributions of non-Federal cash or in-kind resources are available for the project as evidenced through the submitted Cost Share Verification Letters.

6.3 ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (SELECTION PROCESS AND RISK REVIEW)

AMS will conduct a final administrative evaluation of each review panel's top score applications. In addition to the scores, AMS reviews each application to ensure that potential recommended projects align with the scope of the NOFO, allowability of budget items, available funding, geographic coverage/variety (including across program years), and the overall purpose of the program as described in [section 3.2](#). AMS staff will work with top-scored applicants to negotiate any revisions if necessary and possible. AMS will also assess an organization's risk to account for the use of Federal funds and monitor the performance associated with these awards using the guidance provided in [section 6.3.1](#).

6.3.1 RISK REVIEW

Prior to making a Federal award, AMS will review the risk of applicants in managing federal funds. AMS will review the applicant's financial stability, the quality of their management systems and standards, current and prior performance managing federal grants, audit reports and findings, the ability to effectively implement requirements of the Federal award and make sure that the applicant has policies and procedures to manage a federal award. AMS will review the applicant's responsibility and qualification records in SAM.gov, USA Spending, Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS), along with any comments entered by the applicant. For additional information refer to [2 CFR 200.206](#).

If the applicant is found to present significant risk, AMS may choose to not fund the application or place specific conditions as outlined in [2 CFR § 200.208](#) on the award.

AMS will follow government-wide rules which prevent making awards to applicants that have been suspended or debarred from receiving federal awards.

7.0 AWARD NOTICES

7.1 SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

Upon announcement of the Federal awards, AMS will prepare and send a Notice of Award (NOA), which serves as the grant agreement, to each recipient for signature by the appropriate official. The NOA will be signed by AMS and the AOR.

The NOA will provide pertinent instructions and information including, at a minimum, the information described in [2 CFR § 200.211](#) and a reference to the applicable [AMS GT&C](#) and the [USDA GT&C](#).

7.2 UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

AMS will contact unsuccessful applicants via email as soon as possible after the awards are announced. The unsuccessful applicants will receive anonymized review panel consensus comments regarding their applications.

8.0 POST-AWARD REQUIREMENTS AND ADMINISTRATION

8.1 ADMINISTRATIVE AND NATIONAL POLICY REQUIREMENTS

As part of the NOA, all AMS recipients must abide by the [AMS GT&C](#) and [USDA GT&C](#), which reference applicable Administrative and National Policy Requirements.

8.2 REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Recipients must report progress of their project on an annual basis through the electronic submission of performance reports and federal financial reports (SF-425). A final performance and financial report, and applicable closeout documentation must be submitted after the end of the performance period. Additional detail on reporting and award closeout requirements are included in the [AMS GT&C](#) and [USDA GT&C](#). If there are any program or award-specific terms or conditions, those will be identified in the NOA.

8.3 ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF USDA SUPPORT

Proper acknowledgment of your USDA-AMS funding in published solicitations (e.g., for state competitions), presentations, press releases, and other communications is critical for the success of the agency's programs. Recipients must meet the acknowledgement requirements outlined in the updated [AMS GT&C](#) and referenced in the [USDA GT&C](#).

9.0 OTHER INFORMATION

9.1 CIVIL RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS/NON-DISCRIMINATION

All recipients must comply, and certify that they will comply, with all applicable Federal discrimination laws, regulations, and policies throughout the duration of their award, as specified in Section 12.2 of the [USDA GT&C](#).

9.2 ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMMODATION

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, 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.

9.3 ACCOMMODATIONS AND COMPLAINTS

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.

9.4 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

FOIA requests for records relating to this Federal award may be directed to USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, FOIA/PA Officer, Room 2055, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-0201, Telephone: (202) 302-0650; or email: AMS.FOIA@usda.gov. For additional information about the applicability of FOIA to documents, correspondence, and any products related to a Federal award, see Section 1.13 of the [USDA GT&C](#).

9.5 PAPERWORK REDUCTION

Agencies are bound by the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 ([44 U.S.C. 3501](#)). For more information, see [AMS GT&C](#) Section 22.