

Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP)

Frequently Asked Questions

Program Overview:

Question: What is the purpose of the Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP) program?

Answer: The purpose of the RFSP program is to support partnerships that connect public and private resources to plan and develop local or regional food systems. Eligible applicants are partnerships established through an official agreement between at least one eligible entity and at least one eligible partner, as described in the request for applications (RFA).

Funding Priorities:

Question: Are there priority considerations for the RFSP program?

Answer: Yes, there are three priority considerations for this program. Priority consideration will be given to applications that:

- Leverage significant non-Federal financial and technical resources and coordinate with other local, State, Tribal, or national efforts.
- Cover an area that includes communities with areas of concentrated poverty that provide significant opportunities for high impact investment; or
- Have a diverse set of relevant project partners, although such partners need not be based in the partnership's defined region.

Project Types:

Question: Which project types are offered through the RFSP program?

Answer: RFSP offers three project types: Planning and Design, Implementation and Expansion, and Farm to Institution. See Section 1.3 of the RFA for more information.

Question: What factors should be considered when choosing a project type?

Answer: The applicant may consider partnership development stage, structure, partner diversity, and level and type of activities performed under the project scope, among other factors.

Partnerships:

Question: What is the preferred structure of the Partnership?

Answer: There is no "preferred" structure. The applicant should describe the nature of the agreement (such as an MOU or contract document) and the specific project role of each partner in the application.

Question: Who does the "recipient" refer to in the Request for Applications?

Answer: The "recipient" refers to the organization (entity or partner) primarily responsible for receiving and managing the award, if selected.

Eligibility:

Question: Who is eligible to apply for an RFSP grant award?

Answer: Partnerships are eligible to apply for RFSP. As described in the RFA, partnerships are made up of at least one eligible entity and at least one eligible partner under an official agreement. An application may be submitted by either an eligible entity or an eligible partner on behalf of the partnership. The partnership must specify in its application which organization(s) in the partnership are responsible for receiving and managing the award.

Question: What is considered an eligible entity for the RFSP program?

Answer: An eligible entity for the RFSP program includes: Producers, Farmer or Rancher Cooperatives, Producer Networks or Associations, Majority-Controlled Producer-Based Business Ventures, Food Councils, CSA Networks or Associations, Local Governments, Nonprofit Corporations, Public Benefit Corporations, Economic Development Corporations, Regional Farmers Market Authorities, and Tribal Governments. Descriptions of these entity types can be found in Section 3.2 of the RFA.

Question: What is considered an eligible partner?

Answer: An eligible partner for the RFSP program includes: State Agencies or Regional Authorities, Philanthropic Corporations, Private Corporations, Institutions of Higher Education, and Commercial, Federal, or Farm Credit System Lending Institutions. Definitions for these partner types can be found in Section 3.3 of the RFA.

Question: What qualifications or capacities should be considered when deciding which partner should be the applicant entity?

Answer: Per the RFA, applicant entities must be partnerships consisting of at least one eligible entity and at least one eligible partner, and the applicant must specify which partner organization will receive and manage the award, if selected. Therefore, the entity submitting the partnership's application must have the capacity to perform that task.

Question: Can the lead applicant on an RFSP application have an active FMPP or LFPP award?

Answer: In general, this is allowable. The lead applicant or any other eligible entities in the application may be an active FMPP or LFPP grant recipient as long as the work proposed in the RFSP application is not duplicating work done through the FMPP or LFPP grant project. Any active FMPP or LFPP grants awarded to the entities on the application must be identified in the Project Narrative.

Question: Is an LLC or L-Corp eligible to apply for the RFSP program?

Answer: Yes, an LLC or L-Corp may apply if it is an eligible entity or partner and is applying on behalf of an eligible partnership.

Question: Do Aquaculture/Seafood producers qualify as a 'producer' under eligible entities for this grant?

Answer: Yes. For specific eligibility information for the RFSP program, please see Section 3 of the 2022 Request for Applications (RFA).

Question: Can we apply for an RFSP grant if our non-profit (501(c)3) status is still pending with the IRS?

Answer: Yes. If an award is offered, the applicant would need to verify their 501c3 status to receive the RFSP award.

Question: If we are a nonprofit corporation in a particular State but not yet a 501c3 organization, are we eligible?

Answer: State certification of nonprofit status is sufficient for 'eligible entity' status.

Question: Is it correct that the direct recipient of the grant needs to be US domestic, but that the partner(s) don't necessarily have to be?

Answer: That is correct. However, the RFSP grant program only supports projects focused on local and regional food systems within the US and US territories. The [USDA Foreign Agriculture Service \(FAS\)](#) supports US-based organizations performing projects overseas, so you may want to explore grant options with them as well.

Question: Does an applicant or identified partner need to exist a minimum amount of time to qualify?

Answer: No. However, partnerships should consider the financial management and reporting requirements for a federal award when deciding which entity should be the primary/lead applicant for an RFSP award.

Question: Can volunteer groups be considered an eligible entity or partner?

Answer: These types of loosely structured organizations could possibly be listed in the partnership as an eligible entity (such as a producer group) but not an eligible partner. In a case where such an entity may become a subrecipient through an RFSP award, the applicant must ensure the volunteer entity has the capacity to manage the subaward.

Matching Funds:

Question: What is cost sharing or matching?

Answer: Cost sharing or matching is the portion of project costs not paid by Federal funds. This portion of cash and/or in-kind contributions is specified in the RFA. Other Federal funds cannot be used as match.

Question: Are matching funds required for the RFSP program?

Answer: Yes, the 2018 Farm Bill included a 25% cash match requirement for RFSP. In-kind match contributions may be included in the proposal for RFSP, but they do not count towards the 25% statutory requirement.

Question: What is considered a cash match vs. in-kind match?

Answer: A cash match is the organization's own funds, or **cash** donations received from other non-federal entities or non-federal grants. Personnel, equipment, volunteer work or services, time devoted to the project, etc. are considered in-kind. For example, university faculty time spent on the grant project would be an in-kind match, whereas a \$10,000 cash donation from a university partner to pay for someone to work on the grant project would be a cash match.

Question: Can I provide matching contributions above the requirement?

Answer: Yes. Any match resources included in the proposal above and beyond the requirement, whether cash or in-kind contributions, will lend support to the proposal.

Question: Can the match requirement be waived?

Answer: The matching requirement was established in the 2018 Farm Bill legislation, and USDA is not able to waive a statutory requirement. However, please keep in mind that these are partnership grant opportunities where the idea is for partners to contribute to this requirement. It is not intended to make a single organization or partner responsible for contributing the entire match to the project.

Question: Can indirect costs be used toward the required match contribution?

Answer: No. Indirect costs may count as an in-kind match, but not as a cash match contribution.

Question: Can unallowable costs be brought as an in-kind or cost share match?

Answer: No. Only costs allowable under Subpart E of the Cost Principles can be brought as a match. The basis for determining the value of cash and in-kind contributions must be in accordance with [2 CFR § 200.306](#).

Question: Can land, buildings or labor count as in-kind matches?

Answer: Donated land and/or buildings cannot be used as an in-kind match. Labor/personnel may be used as a match, however, only for the percentage of time the person is working on the project. For example, if someone is only spending 25% of their time working on the project, you may only include that 25% as a match contribution to the project. You must also ensure that what you would normally pay that individual is reasonable according to standard personnel rates for similar positions in your geographic locality.

Question: Can unrecovered indirect cost be used as part of the cost sharing or matching?

Answer: Yes, it is allowable to use unrecovered indirect costs as part of cost sharing or matching. Unrecovered indirect cost means the difference between the amount charged to the Federal award and the amount that could have been charged to the Federal award under the potential recipients approved negotiated indirect cost rate.

Question: Does the non-federal match have to be confirmed at the time of proposal submission or can it be lined up by the time of the award?

Answer: All matching contributions must be committed or in place when the proposal is submitted to AMS. Additional anticipated matching funds not in place by the time the project commences cannot be counted toward the matching requirement. Match verification letters are required to be submitted with the application.

Allowability:

Question: Can RFSP funds be used to purchase land or buildings?

Answer: No. It is unallowable to use grant funds for the acquisition of buildings, facilities, or land or to make additions, improvements, modifications, replacements, rearrangements, reinstallations, renovations or alterations to an existing building or facility (including site grading and improvement, and architecture fees).

Grant funds may be used to rent a building or facility for project-specific purposes, during the project's period of performance.

Note: AMS offers architectural design technical assistance at no cost. For more information, visit <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/facility-design>.

Question: Can grant funds be used for construction?

Answer: No. LAMP's authorizing statute ([7 U.S.C. 1627c](#)) does not allow grant funds to be used for any type of construction activities. This also includes construction and construction-related materials, which may include, but are not limited to, the purchase of building materials such as wood, nails, concrete, asphalt, roofing, gravel, sand, paint, insulation, drywall, or plumbing.

Note: AMS offers architectural design technical assistance at no cost. For more information, visit <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/facility-design>.

Question: Does the LAMP program have restrictions that would prevent its use for capital equipment?

Answer: Capital expenditures are typically related to construction or purchase of lands, buildings, etc. These are unallowable costs under most AMS grant programs, including RFSP. Equipment may be an allowable cost depending on the intended use. Please see the Equipment category in Section 8 of the [General Terms and Conditions](#).

Question: Would the engineering and planning costs for a future capital project be allowable?

Answer: In the case of capital project elements, RFSP does allow funds to be used for creating and conducting feasibility studies, implementation plans, and assessments, including studies analyzing capital needs and gaps, research on infrastructure investments for the regional food system, and identifying and applying for resources from other programs to meet those needs (such as paying for a resource development staff to research loan, grant, and other financial resource opportunities for such projects).

Note: AMS offers architectural design technical assistance at no cost. For more information, visit <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/local-regional/facility-design>.

Question: What are the requirements and grant reporting timelines for administering an RFSP grant?

Answer: The grantee's administrative duties for the RFSP program (including reporting requirements) are explained in more detail in the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

Question: Are administrative fees allowable under RFSP?

Answer: RFSP allows for the inclusion of indirect costs (also known as Facility & Administration Fees) as part of the project budget. More information can be found in the "Indirect Costs" section of the RFA.

Question: Can RFSP funds be used to purchase kitchen equipment for a shared community food center?

Answer: If the equipment will be used by persons not performing functions on this proposal, it cannot be purchased with RFSP funds. If the equipment is solely used for the proposal, it will be reviewed according to the guidelines outlined in [Section 8.2 of the Terms and Conditions](#).

Question: For the travel budget section, how should costs be calculated for the AMS grants management meeting required by the RFA?

Answer: We suggest you provide an estimated travel budget for a possible cross-country trip (for example, to California) including airfare, per diem, hotel etc. for at least the Project Coordinator/Manager and potentially up to 2 more key members of the project team.

Question: Can RFSP funds be used to purchase processing equipment for food hubs?

Answer: Processing equipment may be an allowable cost under specific conditions. Refer to the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#), Section 8, for 'special purpose equipment'.

Question: Are the maximum award amounts *inclusive* of indirect/administrative costs?

Answer: Yes.

Question: Are we allowed to apply for this grant using a fiscal agent or sponsor?

Answer: RFSP eligible applicants may use fiscal sponsors/agents in their effort to obtain and administer a grant award under RFSP. Applicants may apply directly and include the contract with a fiscal sponsor in the budget's Contractual section or use a fiscal sponsor to apply on behalf of the applicant/partnership.

An applicant **cannot** accept an award and later transfer the award to another organization (including a fiscal sponsor/agent).

Question: Are production costs allowable?

Answer: Production costs (such as compost, farm tools, soil, seeds and plants, feed, wiring, etc.) are not an allowable cost under RFSP.

Question: Does "applicant" refer to every entity and partner included in the grant application or just the lead organization who applies on behalf of the partnership?

Answer: "Applicant" refers to the primary/lead organization that submits the RFSP application on behalf of the partnership and will be responsible for accepting and administering the grant if one is awarded. An applicant may submit more than one RFSP application but can only receive one RFSP award.

Question: Can partners appear on multiple RFSP applications if the lead applicant is different?

Answer: Yes. A member under one partnership agreement may be included on multiple RFSP applications, and potentially receive funding from more than one RFSP award. However, such a member cannot be paid from both grants for the same work.

Question: If an applicant, partner, or sub-awardee performs lobbying as part of its mission and programs, would this prevent them from being able to participate in an RFSP partnership?

Answer: They can participate in the RFSP project, as long as no RFSP grant funds would be used for lobbying and the entity's normal lobbying efforts aren't related to the proposed project. RFSP funds cannot be used for lobbying activities, and project activities related to lobbying are not allowed.

Question: Can RFSP funds be used for micro-loans or be re-granted?

Answer: No.

Question: Can grant funds be used to purchase vehicles?

Answer: No. Vehicles may be leased, but not purchased. However, lease agreements to own (i.e., lease-to-own or rent-to-own) are not allowable. The lease or rental agreement must terminate at the end of the grant period of performance. A signed copy of the lease agreement will be required prior to first payment approval.

Question: Can funds be used to repair and/or upgrade existing equipment?

Answer: Yes. Funds may be used to repair or upgrade existing equipment that is not available and readily usable in its current condition.

Application/Submission:

Question: Does the Project Narrative page limit exclude required documents such as key staff resumes and match verification letters?

Answer: Yes. The page limit only applies to *content* entered on the Project Narrative template itself. Other required documents such as match letters, commitment letters, and key staff resumes do not count towards this limit.

Question: What is the difference between a contract with an organization and a sub-award?

Answer: Sub-awards are distinct from contracts. Generally speaking, the purpose of a sub-award is to carry out a programmatic portion of the Federal award, while a contract may be used to purchase services needed to carry out the project under a Federal award.

For example, a cattle rancher receives a grant to market grass-fed beef to local restaurants. As part of the project, the rancher needs to update the invoicing system to accommodate new customers. The rancher solicits bids from experts in computer systems and hires the company to upgrade the existing system. This relationship is a procurement relationship rather than a sub-award, and the company is a contractor.

Question: What is the difference between 'partners' and 'food systems collaborators' in Outcome 6?

Answer: A “partner” is an organization under the partnership agreement. A “food system collaborator” is not necessarily in the agreement and could just be someone that participated in a survey, helped organize a meeting, attended a workshop, or similar activity. “Partners” can be included in the numbers for Outcome indicator 6.b.

Question: Can AMS staff review a draft of my application prior to submission?

Answer: AMS cannot review draft applications before they are submitted through Grants.gov. However, if you have specific questions about allowable costs and activities, you are welcome to reach out to us via email at IPPGrants@usda.gov.

Question: Can I submit my application by fax, email, postal mail, or hand delivery?

Answer: No. AMS will not accept applications submitted by fax, paper, email, postal mail, or hand delivery. All applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov.

Question: Does an organization providing a cash or in-kind match contribution need to be a partner or entity named on the project team?

Answer: No. However, a Match Verification Letter as described in section 4.2.5 of the RFA must be included in the application packet. We also recommend including the organization in the Project Narrative table that lists the partners and entities for the project (in the Expertise and Partners section) and put their role as “Funder.”

Question: In selecting a contractor, do we need to go through a procurement/bid process, or could we select one of the contractors we have used in the past?

Answer: This is entirely up to the applicant. However, each state has different procurement rules that you must follow. AMS highly recommends using a competitive bid process (with at least 3 bids) for any procurements under the RFSP award. If the applicant chooses to forego that process, they must still provide justification on the application for selecting that contractor through a noncompetitive process.

Question: Do we need to provide NICRAs for all the project team partners, or just the lead applicant?

Answer: Only the lead applicant should provide a NICRA with the application, if available.

Question: Would only the applicant staff go under Personnel, and all other Project Team partners go under Contractual?

Answer: Correct. The applicant would list all personnel and fringe benefit costs for its project staff under those budget sections, and partner costs would go under Contractual.

Question: Can attachments (match verification letters, etc.) be uploaded as they are received using the add attachment button any place in the Workspace or do some forms need to be attached in the Narrative itself?

Answer: The RFSP Project Narrative form must be submitted as a PDF and attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Project Narrative Attachment Form” on the application package. Other attachments must be attached to the Grants.gov application package using the “Add Attachments” button under Form SF-424 item #15.

Question: Do we need resumes for partner organizations as well as key staff?

Answer: Each person listed in the Key Staff table of the project narrative (under the Expertise and Partners section) must have a resume attached to the application package.

Question: Who is considered the authorized organization representative (AOR)?

Answer: An AOR is the person who has signing authority at an organization, typically the CEO, CFO or Board Chair. This is the person who has ultimate responsibility for administering the RFSP grant funds.

Reviewers:

Question: If my organization submits a proposal to RFSP, can I serve as a reviewer as long as I don't review my own application?

Answer: No. However, you may serve as a reviewer for any of the AMS competitive grant programs for which your organization is not applying.

Question: How can I become a reviewer for the AMS grant programs?

Answer: To become a reviewer, you can register online at [How to Become an Application Reviewer](#).

Prior Awards:

Question: Where can I find information about past recipients of this grant?

Answer: Descriptions of past recipient projects can be found on the "[RFSP Awarded Grants](#)" page of the RFSP website.