Appendix E: Direct Certification Grants Program Proposal Response Guidance

United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

<u>Introduction</u>
The purpose of the Direct Certification Grants Program Proposal Response Guidance is to increase the consistency and understanding of program planning prior to grant award. This guidance aids the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and our grantees in the successful execution of Direct Certification grant projects. The Proposal Response Guidance is a grant application guidance instrument that reduces project risks for the State agency and increases positive outcomes for FNS grantees and FNS programs.

<u>Using the guidance:</u>

- State agency grant applications should address all elements in the guidance table below or provide an explanation of how it is not appropriate to do so. For example, a grant which involves only training would not need to address hardware/software needs. We do require, however, that sections deemed not applicable be noted as such with an explanation for why they are not applicable to ensure the format, as outlined herein, is used. Sample worksheets for training, travel, and equipment related information requests are included in the guidance. FNS encourages your agency to replicate the worksheets in your proposal if you find them to be a helpful model for your agency.

DIRECT CERTIFICATION GRANTS PROGRAM
Proposal Response Guidance

GENERAL PROJECT OVERVIEW
1. Briefly summarize your State agency's challenge(s) involved in implementing direct certification process: [Tip: Provide a brief description about your State's Direct certification system operation (IT capabilities and deficiencies, policies and procedures governing direct certification, staffing levels, interagency cooperation etc). Explain the situation or factor(s) that impact your State agency's ability to more accurately conduct direct certification in Local Education Agencies (LEAs).
2. Briefly summarize project goals, objectives and the solution(s) that will accomplish those goals and objectives: [Tip: Explain what your project would accomplish (e.g., reducing data corruption, identifying error-prone LEAs) and explain what solution(s) will help your project team accomplish your goals (e.g., development of a system interface to improve the quality assurance of incoming data reports from LEAs).]
3. List the performance measures that have been developed to gauge your progress and outcomes in meeting solution delivery and project goals: [Tip: Some sample performance measures include: 1) establishing and meeting set deadlines for accomplishing project milestones, 2) tracking changes in the amount of data reported from LEAs, 3) tracking changes in the amount of reporting errors, or 4) tracking changes in system down time. Describe any performance measures your agency will use to evaluate project success.]
4. Describe how your State agency worked within your organization and with any vendors or external agencies to understand how the project solution(s) will be compatible with the applicable organizations' relevant business processes (Financial Management, IT Architecture, etc.): [Tip: Describe the communication process between the project team and offices/organizations (by name) to include the assurance that the proposed project solutions are realistic, feasible, and would be fully supported by those offices during and after implementation.]
5. Describe how the project solution(s) will fit in with the applicable organizations' relevant business processes: [Tip: You should work with internal offices such as IT, Finance, Acquisition, HR, Communications, and/or any other applicable external office or agency to understand how initiatives (e.g., enhancing an IT solution, providing end-user training) will impact current systems, financial planning and payment processes, and internal training policies.]

6. Include a list of offices within your organization whose daily operations or business processes will be affected by the implementation and/or operation of your proposed solution:
[Tip: Review your proposed solution(s) and list all of the offices and agencies that need to collaborate with your team to achieve project success according to the established time and budget requirements. These are the offices/agencies you must contact concerning integration of the project with their business processes.]

7. Provide the proposed Direct Certification project timeline:
[Tip: Describe how long each phase of your project will take and include the key milestones mapped to each phase. For example, provide a timeline with milestone information for: Development of Concept of Operations period; Design period for each project solution and major task areas necessary for accomplishing a solution; Launch period for each solution; Implementation period for each solution; Operations period for each applicable solution and major task areas necessary for accomplishing a solution; Major benchmark and deliverable dates; and Anticipated project completion date. Applicants need to demonstrate a realistic approach to planning the project timeline. A project timeline will help reduce extension requests.]

8. Summarize any project and/or solution attributes that contribute to project sustainability after award closeout; if this is not an applicable accomplishment for your project summarize why not:
[Tip: <u>If sustainable,</u> an example summary includes: "The startup costs of x technology solution and y system software solution are sunk costs that the agency is unable to fund. However, we can afford x costs per year for the continued end-user training, upkeep, and maintenance of the solutions developed under this project plan. At minimum, we expect to get x life out of the technology solution and y life out of the software product. Additionally, the IT Office and x Program Office's review of the technology and software solution demonstrates how we plan to build in other potential upgrades." <u>If not sustainable,</u> discuss the ongoing costs or other attributes that make sustainability unrealistic at this time.]

PLANNING

9. Describe the proposed timeline of key phases, milestones, and deliverables, including the proposed project completion date:
[Tip: Specify each key phase (e.g., Planning, which should be partially completed upon submission of the proposal, Documentation, Development, and Maintenance); the milestones within each phase; the deliverables necessary to accomplish the project milestones and solutions; and the proposed completion dates for each key phase. Refer to the Sample Timeline Table below as a sample method to provide timeline details within your proposal.]

Sample Timeline Table for Question 9

KEY PHASE / COMPLETION DATE		MILESTONES / COMPLETION DATE		DELIVERABLES / COMPLETION DATE	
(Example) Direct Cert Project Management	*10/15/10*	*- Assess all required deliverables and assign staff and completion dates to all milestones and deliverables* *- Risk assessment and recommendations memo based on internal review of all aspects of the project plan and grant requirements*	*10/01/10* *10/15/10*	*-Completed Project Plan* *-Completed Risk Management Plan*	*10/15/10*

10. Provide a composite listing of all proposed deliverables, including both smaller milestones that produce results, as well as the major final result(s):
[Tip: An example of a deliverable can be final design of a system module, a final test plan, the testing results and findings summary report, and the final delivery of a fully operational system solution. Deliverables and milestones can often be used synonymously. In responding to this guidance element, list all the deliverables and tasks that must be accomplished to successfully complete your final project solution(s), such as key meetings; key outreach activities; results reporting; IT solution designs; action plans; planning documents; risk reports; and status reports that update the project team, key partners, and managers on weekly progress and areas of risk to control to ensure project success.]

11. Identify the internal and external offices, organizations, experts in the field, LEA representatives, or other stakeholders your agency engaged. Explain the role they played during your project planning and solution development processes. A contact's name should be provided for each stakeholder entity discussed in the proposal:
[Tip: Consider what, if any, outreach activities your agency supported to identify problems, challenges, and/or solutions. In particular, consider what research your team conducted with other offices or organizations to collect feedback on possible solutions and project schedules, etc.]

12. Discuss the required partners (agencies, stakeholder groups, etc.) or vendors that will work with your State agency to successfully complete the project:
[Tip: Consider those internal state offices, external offices and organizations, and vendors whose assistance or contributions directly impact the success of the project, including progress toward meeting key project milestones, deliverables, and staying on schedule. Name the partners, and indicate how the collaboration between the project team and partners will strengthen your agency's project proposal application. Letters of intent or partnership letters from partner agencies and vendors are not required; however, they may demonstrate a well supported project plan.]

13. Summarize the method(s) that will be used to track project progress and/or ongoing risk alerts, including who is going to track progress and risks and how often:
[Tip: Example explanation, "two project assistants, R. Thompson and J. Smith, will create an Excel tracking sheet tool with key milestones and budget details for every phase central to accomplishing each deliverable. Every applicable project accomplishment will be recorded with weekly status updates, after which the project assistants will then load the applicable dates and background information into the tracking sheet tool. At the end of each week the project assistants will produce a report including deadlines that must be met over the next two weeks; milestone dates that have been missed and by how much time; other deadlines that are put at risk due to the unmet milestone(s); and a summary of risks reported back by project staff as vetted by applicable project managers. A process will be in place for all core managers and staff to receive this weekly progress report. The reports will be saved past the period of performance of the grant and corrective project plans will be put in place (by the applicable managers) for milestones and/or deliverables that are delayed by more than 21 days. The Excel tracking sheet tool will be designed and finalized within a week of the project kick-off."]

14. Describe the identified existing and/or probable project risks. Summarize the identified risks and the actions the project team and partners will take to reduce the potential negative impacts from those risks:
[Tip: To provide information on your project's risks, your agency and partners should consider the realities of the work involved that are exposed to potential breakdown. Causes of risks may include the following: a complex timeline, use of flawed data, or involvement of a high number of partners that have not traditionally worked together. Some risks may be known or assumed in advance, while other risks are seen as potential or probable. In describing actions that will be taken to minimize identified and/or probable risk(s), also address what actions the agency plans to take to reduce negative outcomes from project risks.]

STAFFING

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15. Identify the roles, responsibilities, and level of relevant experience for all project personnel supporting the project at least 20% of the time, or managing key project areas if less than 20% on the project:
[Tip: The Sample Personnel Table below will help guide you in providing sufficient staffing information. Regardless of what format is used, indicate the title of the project role, name of staff (if known), whether or not the person is currently available, if the person is internal to the agency but a transfer must be executed, or if the person is yet to be identified and/or hired.]

Sample Personnel Staffing Table for Question 15						
TITLE OF PROJECT ROLE & NAME OF STAFF IF KNOWN	**QUANTITY**	**NUMBER IDENTIFIED**	**EXISTING, TRANSFER, OR NEW HIRE**	**PROJECT ROLE & DUTIES**	**MINIMUM LEVEL OF DIRECT EXPERIENCE REQUIRED**	**FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME**
(Example) Regional LEA Coordinator -Mary Andrews -David Jones -TBD	*3*	*2*	*Transfer: Mary Andrews New Hire: David Jones Undetermined: TBD*	*Facilitates applicable project work among regions thereby acting as a regional coordinator. Each coordinator is responsible for two of six regions*	*At a minimum, each coordinator must have 3 years of experience in providing similar stakeholder coordination support in completing program objectives and deliverables. At a minimum, each coordinator must have 1 year of outreach experience*	*Full-time: Mary Andrews three-fourths time: David Jones and TBD employee*

16. Summarize the projected Level of Effort (LOE), inclusive of time and cost, for Direct Cert project staff:
[Tip: Describe how LOE (for both time and cost) was calculated for staff hours to complete project work. The Personnel Cost Breakdown Table will assist in determining Total Cost of Project Personnel and Project Personnel supported by this Grant funding. If your agency prefers not to use this table, it is necessary to provide content within the Direct Certification application proposal describing how LOE estimates were calculated.]

Personnel Cost Breakdown for Question 16				
QUANTITY	**POSITION TITLE/ROLE**	**HOURLY RATE**	**% ALLOCATED**	**LINE TOTAL**
(Example) 1	*ABC Systems Administrator*	*$20/hour*	*50%*	*$20,800*
Total Cost of Project Personnel				**$**
Total Cost of Project Personnel supported by this Grant funding				**$**

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TRAINING / STAFF DEVELOPMENT

17. Describe the purpose of training that is central to the project plan scope:
[Tip: Explain why training is needed in the project, including the type of training and the benefits of administering/offering the specified training.]

18. Summarize the training logistics:
[Tip: Explain which group of employees (title of individuals) will take the training; whether the training is administered online, by CD-ROM, or is classroom-based; and specify the travel plans (location, travel mode, etc.) required to attend classroom-based training.]

Sample Training Logistics Table for Question 18

TRAINING NAME	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES	TITLE	LOCATION	TRAVEL REQUIREMENT
(Example) ABC Training Course	*10*	*Reporting Analysts*	*Online*	*None*

19. Summarize the cost for all proposed training:
[Tip: See the Sample Training Cost Breakdown Table below for guidance.]

Sample Training Cost Breakdown for Question 19

TRAINING NAME	QUANTITY	UNIT RATE	LINE TOTAL
(Example) XYZ Online Course	*2*	*$1,000*	*$2,000*
TRAINING MATERIAL & RELATED COSTS	**QUANTITY**	**UNIT RATE**	**LINE TOTAL**
TOTAL FOR TRAINING			**$**

TRAVEL

20. Summarize travel details for applicable phases of the project:
[Tip: Include the titles of individuals traveling, their purpose(s), projected location and mode of travel.]

21. Provide the cost for all travel:
[Tip: See the Sample Travel Cost Breakdown Table below for guidance.]

Sample Travel Cost Breakdown for Question 21

TRAVEL CATEGORIES	QUANTITY	UNIT RATE	LINE TOTAL
(Example) Flight/Train Ticket Expenses	*2*	*$195*	*$390*

RENTAL CAR AND MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT EXPENSES			
MEALS AND LODGING EXPENSES			
TRAVEL RELATED MATERIALS AND IT EXPENSES			
ON-SITE MEETING ROOM EXPENSES			
TOTAL FOR TRAVEL			**$**

EQUIPMENT

22. Summarize the functional requirements of the hardware/software:
[Tip: Explain the function, capabilities, and/or features of the system that are required for the success of the project. For example, System X needs to support input from end users; System X needs to track the number of data sources available to conduct direct certifications from school Y; System X needs to track the number of matches are identified and communicated to LEAs from school Y. Include diagrams, charts, or tables for further explanation.]

23. Summarize the gap analysis performed on your current IT processes:
[Tip: Provide goals for the future system processes, and a needs assessment to improve the current state of the existing system. This summary should provide evidence that the agency's internal IT staff validated the gap analysis/functionality (also called FIT-GAP), and strongly agrees that the technology solution meets the agency's needs and goals stated in the Direct cert project proposal.]

Sample Gap Analysis Table for Question 23

END STATE	CURRENT STATE	GAPS/ACTION
(Example) Provide number of LEAs with direct cert capability at X school district	*System has no way of certifying more than one school's data*	*Require software that will provide integration of multiple school's data*

24. Summarize the hardware/software configuration:
[Tip: Provide details of the new and/or existing system's design. Include information regarding the hardware/software's platform, data storage methods, charts, and diagrams.]

25. Identify the type of technology solution needed for project completion:
[Tip: In anticipation of this grant, list the hardware/software you have researched as possible candidates to procure: Include hardware/software type and functionality, and identify possible vendors. If there is an upgrade to an existing system, name the hardware/software. In enquiring about items that involve acquisition, FNS reminds agencies that they must comply with all state and federal acquisition regulations.]

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26. Explain how the proposed technology solution will fit into your business and organizational needs:
[Tip: Provide details in your agency's proposal that evidences that x, y and z office have reviewed relevant proposal components and agreed with the feasibility of acquiring such solutions, and on the proposed schedule and cost.]

27. If there is an existing system/software application in place with similar functions, describe the integration plans and its ability to integrate with the existing databases:
[Tip: Explain how your agency or applicable partner offices would integrate the new equipment with the existing system. Provide evidence that the new hardware/software will be able to communicate with the existing system, for example, include verification information from your IT Office describing the integration within the Direct Cert project proposal.]

28. If there is a need to migrate data to the new system, describe the migration process:
[Tip: Explain what procedures are needed to transfer old data into the new system; describe if and how unused data will be archived, discarded, or cleansed.]

29. Summarize the test plan for your system/software:
[Tip: Describe how you will verify that your system and/or software is functioning properly; provide the high level functional, data, and user and system performance testing procedures; and include the test item, risk issues, and features to be tested complete with proposed test schedule, if available.]

30. Describe the plans to maintain the system and/or software:
[Tip: Provide information on procedures to sustain the system and/or software: Define the support environment, roles and responsibilities, and maintenance activities; monitor the system for continued performance and provide the necessary system modifications; and identify the support environment, including the development, maintenance, and target host environments.]

31. Provide the type and quantity of each hardware and/or software item requested:
[Tip: List the hardware/software product and how many items are requested in your project proposal.]

32. Summarize the cost for all equipment:
[Tip: See the Sample Equipment (Hardware & Software) Cost Breakdown Table below for guidance.]

Equipment (Hardware & Software) Cost Breakdown for Question 32			
ACQUISITION COSTS	**QUANTITY**	**UNIT/HOURLY RATE**	**ACQUISITION COST TOTAL**
(Example) ABC Database System	*10*	*$5,000*	*$50,000*
IMPLEMENTATION COSTS	**QUANTITY**	**UNIT/HOURLY RATE**	**IMPLEMENTATION COST TOTAL**
		$	$
OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE COSTS	**QUANTITY**	**UNIT/HOURLY RATE**	**OPERATION & MAINTENANCE COST TOTAL**
		$	$
EQUIPMENT TOTAL			**$**