

Farm to School Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions

Posted April 27, 2012

GENERAL

Q: What are the legislative authorities guiding this program?

A: The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 amended Section 18 of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to establish a Farm to School program in order to assist eligible entities, through grants and technical assistance, in implementing farm to school programs that improve access to local foods in eligible schools.

Q: What is the purpose of the Farm to School Grant Program?

A: The purpose of this program is to improve access to local foods in eligible schools.

Q: How is “local” defined for the Farm to School Grant Program?

A: “Local” is left to each applicant to define. USDA fully expects applicants of this RFA to have varying definitions of “local” and “regional” as each definition may be specific to individual contexts.

Q: What is the timeline of the Farm to School Grant Program?

A: Here are the important dates:

- April 17, 2012: Request for Applications Released
- May 18, 2012: (Suggested) Letter of Intent Deadline
- June 15, 2012: Proposals Due
- (Pending the Availability of Federal Funds) Shortly after October 1, 2012: Awards Announced and Funds Available

Q: Is more than one type of grant offered?

A: Yes, USDA is soliciting applications for two types of grants:

1. Planning grants are intended for school districts or schools just starting to incorporate farm to school program elements into their operations.
2. Implementation grants are intended to help scale or further develop existing farm to school initiatives.

Q: What percentage of awarded grants will be Implementation projects and how many will be Planning projects?

A: We expect Planning grants will represent approximately 25 percent of the total grant funding awarded, while Implementation grants are expected to represent 75 percent of the total awards. Based on the number, quality, and diversity of applications, the actual percentages of grant awards may be different than those noted above.

Q: Can I submit an application for both a Planning and an Implementation grant?

A: No, only one application per eligible entity is permitted. Applicants must choose between submitting a Planning grant or an Implementation grant, and in either case, may only submit one application.

Q: How many projects can I apply for?

A: An eligible applicant can serve as the lead on only one application. You must choose between submitting a Planning grant or an Implementation grant, and in either case, may only submit one application. You may be listed as a collaborator or partner on several applications.

Q: As a SFA can I apply with other schools in my area?

A: Yes, In addition to individual submissions, USDA will consider submissions where a USDA investment might impact multiple districts and thus a broader geographic range than any one district might cover. This could take the form of: (1) a “Cluster” submission with one lead district that is collaborating with multiple districts to conduct a comprehensive regional or multidistrict planning process, or (2) multiple individual “Linked” submissions from districts where coordinated efforts and collaboration between the districts can lead to greater impact in the region. In the case of (2), as with “Individual” submissions, every application received will be evaluated on its own merit.

Q: How might I find others to partner or “cluster” with?

A: You might connect with the Farm to School Coordinator in your State Department of Agriculture or Education. For a complete list of farm to school coordinators across the country, see our [map](#).

PLANNING GRANTS

Q: What groups are eligible to apply for Planning grants?

A: Only K-12 SFA’s, non-profit private schools, charter schools, Indian tribal schools, and others that participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Programs are eligible to receive planning grants.

Q: What is the expected funding amount for Planning grants?

A: Planning grant amounts are to be a minimum of \$20,000 and shall not exceed \$45,000.

Q: What is the time period for execution of Planning grants?

A: All Planning grant activities must be completed in one year. Applicants should expect the grant life cycle to include stand up activities, execution, and close out activities (i.e., final financial and program reports, submission of an implementation plan, accounting, etc.). Applicants are expected to plan accordingly in order to achieve project deliverables within the grant period specified.

IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS

Q: What groups are eligible to apply for Implementation grants?

A: USDA invites two types of Implementation grant applications: those from K-12 SFA’s, nonprofit private schools, charter schools, Indian tribal schools, and others that participate in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Programs and those from all other eligible entities (including State and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers, and non-profit entities).

Q: What is the expected funding amount for Implementation grants?

A: Implementation grant amounts are to be a minimum of \$65,000 and shall not exceed \$100,000.

Q: What is the time period for execution of Implementation grants?

A: Implementation grants are expected to range from 1 – 2 years. Applicants should expect the grant life cycle to include stand up activities, execution, and close out activities (final financial and program reports, accounting, etc.). Applicants are expected to plan accordingly in order to achieve project deliverables within the grant period specified.

Q: As a school, can I partner with community groups for an Implementation grant?

A: Yes, applicants will be required to show proof of existing partnerships via letters of support (See Section IX: What to Include of the [RFA](#)). Partners essential to the proposed project that may require funding from USDA to participate in the proposed project can be included in a school application as a subgrantee or line item contractor. Alternatively, eligible community partners may submit a separate application for funding.

Q: Which should I submit for, a Planning grant or an Implementation grant?

A: If you are an SFA just getting started, don't already have lots of partnerships in place, and have not yet really articulated your ultimate goal and specific steps along the path to get there – then a Planning grant is likely a reasonable approach. If you generally know what you need to do to scale up your current farm to school efforts, have most of the partnerships already in place to do it, and have been successfully executing farm to school for a few years – then an Implementation grant is likely a reasonable approach.

ELIGIBILITY

Q: Who is eligible to apply?

A: Authorizing language specifies the following eligible entities:

- Eligible schools;
- State and local agencies;
- Indian tribal organizations;
- Agricultural producers or groups of agricultural producers; and
- Non-profit entities.

Q: Can you define non-profit entities?

A: Non-profit entities are defined as any corporation, trust, association, cooperative, or other organization which: (1) Is operated primarily for scientific, educational, service, charitable, or similar purposes in the public interest; (2) Is not organized primarily for profit; and (3) Uses its net proceeds to maintain, improve, and/or expand its operations. For this purpose, the term “non-profit organization” excludes colleges and universities; hospitals; State, local, and federally-recognized Indian tribal governments; and those non-profit organizations which are excluded from coverage of this part in accordance with §230.20(c). (2 CFR Part 230.25)

Q: Are institutions of higher learning eligible to apply for a grant?

A: Institutions of higher learning can partner with eligible entities such as schools, States and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agricultural producers or non-profit organization. However, they cannot submit an application as the primary grantee.

Q: Can a University Extension Service Program apply for a grant?

A: Institutions of higher learning can partner with schools, States and local agencies, Indian tribal organizations, agriculture producers or non-profit organization. However, they cannot submit an application as the primary grantee.

Q: Are pre-school or head start programs eligible for either the Planning or Implementation grants?

A: No, at this time, funding is not available for farm to school initiatives focused on pre-K environments or for providers participating exclusively in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). For this RFA, funding is intended only for those projects that will ultimately benefit children in grades K-12 served through the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

Q: Do you have to have a certain percentage of free and reduced price meal participation in order to apply?

A: No.

Q: Are there additional eligibility requirements for Implementation grants?

A: In order to be deemed eligible, school applicants must show evidence of existing community support and engagement via no less than three letters of support. All other applicants besides schools must show proof of support from, or the active engagement of, at least one K-12 SFA, nonprofit private school, charter school, Indian tribal school, or other that participates in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Programs by including letters of support from the school district or school that will benefit from the proposed project. This is intended to ensure school districts are vested partners in and/or ready markets for any farm to school activities funded through this grant solicitation request.

MATCHING FUNDS

Q: Are matching funds required?

A: Federal funds may constitute no more than 75 percent of the total project budget. The grant recipient must show evidence of matching support of at least 25 percent of the total budget in the form of cash or in-kind contributions, including facilities, equipment or services provided by State and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private sources as defined in The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act.

Q: What is an in-kind contribution?

A: In-kind contributions are generally defined, when used as a cost share or match for a grant, as the value of goods or services provided by a third-party for the benefit of the grant program, where no funds transferred hands. These contributions cannot satisfy a cost sharing or matching requirement for this grant program if they are used towards satisfying a match requirement under any other Federal grant agreement the applicant is party to.

Q: What is a cash contribution?

A: A cash contribution means the recipient's cash outlay, including the outlay of money contributed to the recipient by non-Federal third-parties. Some examples of cash contributions are:

- The salary and fringe benefits of the grantee or third-party employees in proportion to their efforts under a project.
- The grantee's cost to purchase items of equipment to be used under a project.

Q: Do I need to note where the matching funds will come from in my application?

A: The match contributions reflected in the grant proposal submitted must be documented, including the basis for the value determination as well as be allowable, reasonable and allocable.

Q: Do I need all the required matching resources secured prior to issuing the award or submission of application?

A: Yes, in order for us to issue the award, the grantee must meet the requirement of 25% matching by providing information that they have secured the matching funds. In addition, documentation of match must be maintained for audit or review of the project.

Q: Can I use federal food service funds as a match for this grant program?

A: No.

Q: If I anticipate receiving funds from other sources in the future (i.e., weeks, months, year,) may I count them as anticipated matching costs?

A: The grantee is responsible for providing a 25% match and information confirming this match at the time of application. The total grant budget submitted in the grant application, must reflect the requirement of a split of 75% federal and 25% non-federal funds to support the project. If, during the grant period, the 25% match is not met, the grantee's federal funds will be adjusted to ensure the federal grant funds account for only 75% of the total project budget. .

BUDGET

Q: What can I include in my budget?

A: Budget expenses can include personnel, contractors, equipment and supplies, meeting expenses, travel, and trainings.

Q: Are equipment and supplies allowable expenditures?

A: Yes, both equipment (i.e., items of personal property having a useful life of more than one year and a cost of \$5,000 or more such as walk-in freezers, coolers, or ovens) and supplies (e.g., knives, cutting boards, and food processors) are allowable expenses for the Implementation grants. Salad bars are also an allowable expense.

Q: Can I use Planning or Implementation grant funds to purchase food?

A: Yes, however no more than 10% of the grant funds may be used for food purchases in the grant budget. The ultimate goal of funded projects should be to make local food products available on school menus; however, purchasing local products should not be a primary use of grant funds. Food purchases should be limited to educational purposes, including but not limited to: farm to school sample tables, taste tests, or promotional use. Food costs related to conducting a test run of a new local or regional product are also deemed an appropriate use of funds.

Q: What rate should I use for indirect costs?

A: If available, the current indirect cost rate negotiated with the cognizant Federal negotiating agency should be used. Indirect costs may not exceed the negotiated rate. If a negotiated rate is used, the percentage and base should be indicated. If no rate has been established the applicant may indicate "None—will negotiate" and a reasonable dollar amount for indirect costs may be requested, which will

be subject to approval by USDA. In the latter case, if a proposal is recommended for funding, an indirect cost rate proposal must be submitted prior to award to support the amount of indirect costs requested. FNS will request an indirect cost rate proposal and provide instructions, as necessary. An applicant may elect not to charge indirect costs and, instead, use all grant funds for direct costs. If indirect costs are not charged, the phrase "None requested" should be used.

Q: What should I include in the budget narrative?

A: You should include a narrative line item description for every allowable cost and show how it supports the project goals. For example, the narrative should describe the positions and the percentage of time to be spent on the project, the number of trips and the average cost per trip, the types of supplies to be purchased, the specific equipment to be purchased, contractors tasks, etc.

APPLICATION

Q: Will the USDA Farm to School Team review or edit my application/project narrative before I submit my (official) application?

A: No, the Farm to School Team will not review any portion of the grant application prior to the due date, or provide comments about the application during the review and selection processes.

Q: What do I need to include in my Planning grant application?

A: Please refer to page 19 of the [Request for Applications](#).

Q: I am a SFA, what do I need to include in my Implementation grant application?

A: Please refer to page 22 of the [Request for Applications](#).

Q: I am a part of a producer group, what do I need to include in my Implementation grant application?

A: Please refer to page 26 of the [Request for Applications](#).

Q: Will FNS accept applications submitted after the deadline?

A: No.

Q: How will I know FNS received my application?

A: FNS recommends that you print your Grants.gov confirmation for your records as proof of timely delivery.

Q: What happens if I forget to include one of the documents in my Grants.gov application?

A: Your application package will be rejected for review consideration. The only means of making a correction or adding to a Grants.gov application is re-submitting a new application prior to the deadline.

Q: Why do you need resumes or Vitae of senior personnel?

A: To ensure that the project directors and other personnel are qualified to carry out the objectives of the project.

Q: Can I mail my application?

A: No, only applications submitted via [grants.gov](#) will be accepted.

Q: What should I do after I submit my application via grants.gov?

A: Once the applicant has submitted its application, an e-mail should be sent to Farm2School2013@fns.usda.gov stating that the application was submitted through the grants.gov portal. Please be aware that the grants.gov system provides several confirmation notices; you need to be sure that you have confirmation that the application was accepted.

Q: Is there an application checklist?

A: Yes, please see pages 40-41 of the [Request for Applications](#).

LETTER OF INTENT

Q: Do I have to submit a Letter of Intent?

A: Before submitting a Planning grant or an Implementation grant proposal, applicants are requested to first submit a Letter of Intent notice by May 18, 2012. The notice is not required, nor does it obligate the applicant to submit an application. The notice simply provides FNS with useful information in preparing for the review and selection process.

Q: What should I include in my letter of intent?

A: The notice should include the potential applicant's name and address, organization's name, telephone number, and e-mail address of the primary point of contact. Please also indicate which type of eligible entity you are and which type of grant application (Planning or Implementation) will be submitted.

Q: To whom should I send my letter of intent?

A: Send the letter via the mail or e-mail to the FNS Grants Officer identified below:

Gregory Walton, Grants Officer
Grants and Fiscal Policy Division
U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 732
Alexandria, VA 22302
E-mail: Farm2School2013@fns.usda.gov

REVIEW OF APPLICATION AND AWARD

Q: What happens after I submit my application?

A: FNS will conduct an initial screening of all applications to ensure they are eligible and fully responsive.

Eligible and responsive applications are those that meet the following requirements:

1. Submitted by eligible applicants (see [Section IV: Eligibility Requirements](#));
2. Meet all other eligibility requirements (see [Section IV: Eligibility Requirements](#));
3. Submitted on or before the required deadline (see [Section VII: Important Dates and Award Periods](#));
4. Include at least a 25 percent match;
5. Are complete (see [Section IX: Grant Application: What to Include](#)); and
6. Are in the required format (see [Section X, Application Format](#)).

If an application does not include all appropriate information, FNS will consider the application to be non-responsive and will eliminate it from further evaluation.

Q: When will I be notified of the status after I submit the application?

A: Awards are expected to be made in early FY2013.

Q: How will my application be reviewed?

A: After initial screening, FNS will convene an evaluation panel to consider the merit of each grant application. Each application that passes initial screening will be given to the panel to be evaluated and scored according to how well it addresses each application component. The panel will assign each application a score using the evaluation criteria and weights specified below for each evaluation component. Please see pages 31-35 of the [RFA](#) for details on how applications will be evaluated.

Q: How will applications be selected for funding?

A: A list of all applications deemed eligible for award will be submitted to the Selection Official for a final decision regarding funding. The Selection Official has ultimate authority to decide which applications are approved and funded, and generally will adhere to the recommendations made by the reviewers, provided that funding is available. However, the Selection Official reserves the right to deviate from those recommendations. The Selection Official may take other factors, including FNS and USDA priorities, into account when granting awards and/or not awarding a particular award.

Q: Will my application be funded at the amount requested?

A: As part of the technical review process, FNS will review applicants' budgets to ensure that all costs are reasonable, allowable and applicable. Applications selected and approved for funding with budgets that are realistic, well justified, and supported will likely be funded at the requested amounts. However, FNS reserves the right to fund applications out of rank order to achieve priorities identified earlier; or at lesser amounts if FNS determines that the project can be implemented with less funding; or at lesser amounts if Federal funding is not sufficient to fully fund all applications that merit awards. This is subject to availability of funds.

GRANTS.GOV

Q: If I have problems with Grants.gov, will FNS staff help me submit or accept my application package after the deadline?

A: No, FNS will not provide applicants technical assistance with the Grants.gov system. The Grants.gov technical support center can be reached at 800-518-4726 or support@grants.gov.

Q: Where can I get more help if I still have questions about the farm to school program or application?

A: The USDA Farm to School Team strongly recommends that you read the Farm to School Grant RFA before placing a call. If you still have questions after reading the RFA, you can forward your question to:

Deborah Kane, National Director, Farm to School Program, Food & Nutrition Services (FNS)
Deborah.Kane@fns.usda.gov or 503.326.2010

Gregory Walton, Grants Management Specialist, FNS
Farm2School2013@fns.usda.gov or 703.305.1575